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[“DOLLY, IF IT WASN’T FOR THE HOME TROUBLES WOULD YOU, COULD YOU, CARE FOR ME?” SAID GEORGE.]

## THIRTEEN TO THE DOZEN.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

MANY things are reckoned by complaisant tradespeople “thirteen to the dozen”—new-laid eggs, some kinds of fruit, almost every variety of tartlet, and, in fact, the greater part of the smaller general purchases of life—and as a rule those who become possessed of the one extra think they have made rather a good bargain; but Mr. Horace Truscot was very far from being gratified when the Providence which had decreed he should have a dozen children, bountifully followed the example of the baker, the greengrocer, and the purveyor of new-laid eggs: in a word, when the last addition to his nursery came in the form of twins, and he found himself at forty the father of thirteen children, of whom the eldest was only seventeen.

Not only was it an enormous family for a poor man—Mr. Truscot was poor and proud, about the most trying of combinations—but it was an exasperating one.

The four boys all had a gap of five years between them, and each boy, Mrs. Truscot had fondly hoped, would be the last baby, for the rule of her nursery had been two girls and a boy, a pause of three years, two girls and a boy, and so on till the fourth boy had broken through all precedent by arriving accompanied by a twin sister.

“They will all starve,” said Horace Truscot, hopefully, as he looked at the two little red faces. “Thirteen children, and not one of them able to earn their own living! I shall be ruined!”

But fate was merciful to him—the twins were the last babies; and by the time they were seven years old the eldest son, Dick, had got an appointment in India and gone to it, while the second, Rex, was a junior clerk in a London bank.

It was as well someone did something, for Horace Truscot had quite given up all attempts at earning money. A terrible attack

of rheumatic fever had left him almost crippled, and he forthwith decided his family must do the best they could to live on his younger son’s portion, which brought in two hundred a year.

Mrs. Truscot believed in her husband implicitly, and would have sacrificed the whole family to his slightest whim. Instead of persuading him to exert himself she gave way to all his invalid habits.

Waiting on him took up most of her time, and so the reins of domestic government slipped from her nerveless fingers to be grasped by those of her energetic eldest daughter.

Kitty was twenty-four, but she was a great deal more like a mother to her twelve juniors than poor, faded Mrs. Truscot.

The one servant deferred to Kitty in all things. She kept the family purse, and doled out its contents with miserly care; but the struggle had left its mark on her, there were lines about her face which did not belong to her years, and she had a way of puckering up her brows which Dick always said made her look like an old woman.

Dick was Kitty's special brother, but he was thousands of miles away now, and life had seemed a little harder to the elder sister since he sailed for India.

After that the dear, shabby old red-brick house, crammed full, as it was, of children, had always something wanting to Dame Darden, a pet name bestowed on Kitty years before by her father, and which, with the tenacity of pet names, had stuck to her ever since.

The Dame—to use her most familiar title—was not pretty. She had no time for the little vanities with which Lettice and Myrtle made the most of their good looks. She was far too busy to study fashion plates or try different styles of hair-dressing till she found one to suit her.

Dame Darden had lovely hair, rich, warm, nut-brown, and such masses of it that it fell round her like a veil, and she could sit on it easily; but no one would have guessed its abundance from the tight plaits in which she contrived to screw it, just as no one could have suspected her of a love for bright colours, and divined that she always wore dark brown and navy blue only because these time-honoured shades withstood the ravages of sun and rain.

"What's the matter, Dame Darden?" asked her second sister, Dolly, as the Dame came into the little room they shared, with an unusually troubled face. "You look a cup too low."

Dolly was sitting at a little table in the window hard at work, writing as fast as her pen could go.

Mr. Truscot's second daughter hoped some day to be famous as an authoress. Several of her stories had already been bought and published.

The fame might come in the far distant future, or might easily refuse to be wooed; but the fact remained that Dolly earned almost as much as her father's whole income every year, and that, being the soul of generosity, she poured her treasure into Dame Darden's lap to use for the family benefit.

It was not quite fair—even Kitty thought so—Mr. and Mrs. Truscot looked on all Dolly's earnings as their right. The invalid insisted on various small luxuries and when his daughter began to contribute to the income, his wife calmly suggested keeping back a certain sum for his "little comforts."

Dolly worked tremendously hard. Dame Darden never wasted a penny entrusted to her, and yet every month that came the two girls found it increasingly difficult to roll the family coach up the hill.

"It's a shame to disturb you," said Dame Darden, wearily, "but papa and mamma are actually going away to the seaside."

The pen dropped from Dolly's hand in amazement.

"The seaside in August, when everything is at its dearest! Dame, where on earth will they get the money? They can't get credits for railway tickets and lodgings."

"Oh, the dividends were paid yesterday, and I suppose it will come out of that."

The girls looked at each other aghast. When, some five years before, Mrs. Truscot had resigned the housekeeping to Kitty, she had resigned the purse too. One eighth of his income the valetudinarian kept back—and twenty-five pounds was a good share of two hundred—but all the rest she had had to count on.

When Dolly began to earn, there had dawned quite a bright time for Dame Darden's finances; she had even hoped in time to be able to afford a morning governess for the girls. Then, little by little, Mr. Truscot required more indulgences, and now it really seemed that he meant to keep the whole half-year's dividends for himself.

"I wish you would speak to him, Dolly," said poor Kitty. "I've tried, and it's no use; he only strolls up and down and quotes Shakespeare. He compares himself to King Lear, I believe."

There was only one year between the two

sisters; they were deeply attached to each other. Half Dolly's pleasure in her own success had been that she was able to lighten the Dame's burden; and now it seemed to her she had only been pandering to her father's weakness after all.

Dolly was very clear-sighted. If her earning more money meant her father frisking away more, and Kitty's struggle was not to be made easier, why, she might as well not earn it.

"I know," said Dame Darden, simply, "it's a poor return to make to you, dearest; but I do believe the more money you make, the more they spend."

"Where is papa?"

They were forbidden to say father and mother. Mrs. Truscot had a great dread of growing old, and she thought to be called mamma made her seem younger. This was only one of her many foibles.

"In the study. Dolly, you are never going now, it's his hour for lying down."

"If I don't go now, Dame Darden, when I am wound up, I shall be at all. I couldn't in cold blood tell my own father I don't mean him to live on my earnings, and that's what it comes to."

In the study Mrs. Truscot had gathered all the remains of prosperous days. The best furniture the house afforded was found there. Most of the family knickered humbly at the door for admittance; Dolly being—as she put it—"wound up," omitted this trifling ceremony and walked in.

Mr. Truscot was extended on the sofa, a glass of wine and a plate of grapes on a little table at his hand. His faithful wife had gone out, probably to change his novel at the library.

"This is my hour for repose," said the valetudinarian, in a tone of mild reproach, as he saw the intruder; to anyone but Dolly he would have shown positive anger, but as a source of income he gave her a silent respect.

"It is my hour for writing," returned Dolly. "But times and seasons have to be altered occasionally, and I want to speak to you."

Mr. Truscot requested her to be brief, his poor nerves would not bear much.

"I shall not keep you long. Kitty tells me you have stopped her house-keeping allowance, and that you require the whole of this half-year's dividend for yourself."

Horace Truscot shuffled uneasily. It was one thing to browbeat poor patient Dame Darden; it was quite another to cross this very bold self-opinionated young woman whose brains seemed likely to prize a veritable gold-mine.

"Kathleen misunderstood me. I said my shattered health required a month's relaxation at the sea-side. When I return I will give her all the money I have left."

"Which would be nothing."

"Really, Dorothy," he always called his children by their baptismal names when particularly displeased, "you have no right to speak like this."

"Kitty is my sister," said Dolly, warming to the fray, "and I won't see her quite broken down by overwork and poverty."

"I thought you assisted her. I was given to understand you had contributed handsomely to her finances?"

Dolly put her foot down with a stamp.

"There are fourteen people in this house, counting the servant. It is hard work enough to feed them at the best of times, but—"

Mr. Truscot put his hands to his ears.

"Pray spare me these scurrilous details; they are no concern of mine."

"Then whose concern are they?" demanded Dolly. "I suppose you can't hold Kitty responsible for the food and education of her younger sisters, and the children didn't exactly ask to be born. For my part," and the girl sighed a little wearily, "if I had been consulted as to whether I would enter this lower world I should certainly have said 'No.'"

Mr. Truscot closed his eyes.

"You can't go to sleep till you've answered me. Is Kitty to have her usual allowance?"

"No."

"Very well. Then as I don't choose to see my sister worried into her grave I shall leave the Rookery."

Mr. Truscot reopened his eyes.

"What for?"

"I work very hard and money worries don't assist literary labours. I shall take rooms in some pleasant quarter, and leave you to look after your family."

The valetudinarian stared.

"And you profess to care so much for Kathleen."

"It's not profession only; I do care."

"Yet you desert her."

"Don't you see," explained the girl, scornfully, "so long as I am here and give Dame Darden all my earnings, by straining every nerve, she can just keep things going, but she is wearing herself into her grave to do it. When I am gone, and she can't stave off ruin, it will come, and you'll have to make different arrangements."

"I wonder you dare to speak so!"

"Well, said Dolly slowly, "someone must speak. Mother would be the right person, but she won't. You are just sinking into a nervous fanciful invalid. You are only forty-three; you've plenty of abilities, and if you pulled yourself together you could keep your family as other people do. Instead of that, you shut yourself up and fancy you're an invalid, and all the trouble of everything falls on Kitty."

Dame Darden was busy darning one of the children's stockings when Dolly rejoined her.

"Have you done anything?"

"I've been abominably rude, and was finally ordered out of the study."

"Dolly!"

"And I'm going a little farther, Dame Darden. Things can't remain as they are now. If I am once away he must give you some more money!"

"He can't!"

"Then he'll have to get some of his grand relations to help him. Dame Darden, I thought to-day it was a thousand pities fate had made papa a younger son; as a wealthy baronet he would have been a father to be proud of!" and she laughed.

"Dolly—don't!"

"My dear," said the younger girl, with something which sounded like a sob, "don't you know there are times when one must either laugh or cry, and I prefer the first!"

"But—"

"I shall get rooms somewhere near," said Dolly dreamily; "and you will have to come and see me very often, and I shall give you strong tea and pound cake, and we shall be happy together just for half-an-hour. It will do you good, Dame Darden to have to go out. I believe you never see the outside of the Rookery gates except on Sundays."

But Dame Darden had not Dolly's spirit; she looked almost terrified. "You are so young, dear—and so pretty!"

"I'm twenty-three," retorted Dolly, "and women who write are never pretty!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, men never think them pretty!" corrected, Dolly. "It seems to me, Dame Darden, a man would just as soon hear one profess to be an ardent champion of woman's rights as know one 'wrote.' They think it's a kind of crime."

"And did that particular man?"

"What particular man?"

"The gentleman you met at Mrs. Jenkins' evening party, who walked home with you?"

Dolly blushed rosy red and looked prettier than ever.

"You may put Mr. Carlyle quite out of your head, Dame Darden; I shall never see him again."

"But you liked him?"

"He was very nice—for a man!"

"Then why shalln't you see him again?"

"Dame Darden, for the head of a family you have very little knowledge of etiquette. The only person I know that knows Mr. Carlyle, that sounds involved, but it's what I



mean, has left London. I have not the faintest idea where he lives. He probably has never given me a second thought. We spent one very pleasant evening in each other's company; but if he remembers me at all, which I doubt, it's as the young woman in limp book-muslin, whom he escorted home enveloped in a shabby waterproof."

"You looked very nice."

"I didn't there, among all the fresh elegant toilets. My dear Dame Durden, it's only in fiction that a washed-out muslin carries off the palm from the most artistic creations of Regent-street. I felt like a big white blot on Mrs. Jenkins, *mis en scène*."

"Not a big one," said the Dame, squeezing Dolly's hand, "you are too much of a fairy for that. And, oh," with a sigh, "to think you might have had a new dress for that party, if Jack and Jill had not caught the measles and taken your money for the doctor's bill."

"My dear Dame Durden, it was not the twins' fault, poor children. It's one of their unlucky habits always to want something dreadfully when we are extra hard-up."

"It only you had had a new dress!"

"Why?" Dolly, was really laughing now. "Do you think Mr. Carlyle would have been impressed by it?"

"I think you liked him, and—"

"Dame Durden I like Mr. Jenkins and old Dr. Sturgess—oh, and all my editors; but I never heard you suggest I should buy a new frock to go and interview them in."

Kitty sighed.

"You are twenty-three," she said, slowly, "and mother was only twenty when she married."

"My dear Dame Durden, I shall never marry anyone. I should be so dreadfully afraid of his turning out like—"

She would have added, "Papa," but a look of distress on Kitty's face made her keep back the last word. After a pause, she added gaily,—

"No, dear; you and I will be two nice old maids. You shall keep house, and my pen will keep the pot boiling. Then when Dick comes home from India, minus a liver but plus a pension, we'll all three live together as happy as the days are long."

"And the others?" questioned Dame Durden. "There are just ten reasons against your plan, Dolly."

"Well, Lettice and Myrtle are sure to marry. They're just the style of girl who can't help it. Rex is fairly out of hand, and I think if mother stretched a point she might contrive to look after the remaining seven."

The Truscots dined early, because it was economical, the parents very seldom appeared at all at the scrambling six o'clock tea, which was the last meal of the day for the four younger children. To night after the tracas of the morning, Dolly quite believed they would absent themselves, but, to her surprise, Mr. Truscot came in just as Dame Durden had filled the children's mugs, and took his place at the head of the table.

"Isn't mother coming?" asked Myrtle, a pretty girl of eighteen, who was by way of being the valetudinarian's favourite child.

"No, she is far too much upset. I am going away to-morrow, children, to recruit my jaded nerves. Your mother, of course, accompanies me, and we have decided to take Lettice and Myrtle with us."

A stare of surprise went round the table, but the two picked out for honour showed no appreciation of it, and Lettice said, warmly,—

"You're very kind, papa, but we'd rather stay at home."

The thought of being boxed up in a stuffy lodging, while their mother expected them to join her in a private admiration society of their father, was too much for Myrtle, and she promptly chimed in,—

"We can't possibly go, papa. I teach the children, and Lettice does some of the needle-

work; Dame Durden could never get on without us."

"You are my children, I believe," returned Mr. Truscot, coldly, "and I insist on your accompanying me and your mother to Eastbourne. After being lectured on my selfishness till I agree to sacrifice my own quiet and comfort, I am not going to have my plans upset by two foolish children."

"We're much too shabby to go to a fashionable place like Eastbourne," said Letty, with blunt frankness; "and Dame Durden—"

"Your eldest sister has nothing to do with it," said her father, crossly. "If I leave you and Myrtle here under her influence, you will grow as insubordinate as she and Dorothy have already done. At ten o'clock to-morrow we start. Not another word."

The meal was finished in unbroken silence; but when it was over, and the little ones had dispersed, Myrtle and Lettice appealed to Kitty.

"You know, Dame Durden, it will be awful. We shall not be allowed to speak above a whisper, because of papa's nerves, and it will cost—oh! an awful lot of money."

They sat down on either side of the careworn eldest sister. Myrtle had one of her hands, and was stroking it caressingly, Lettice cuddled up close to the Dame as though she feared even then to be torn away from her.

"I'm afraid you must go, dears," said Kitty, sadly. "I shall miss you terribly, but the change will do you good, and—"

"But it will cost such a lot, Dame."

Dolly came to the rescue.

"Papa won't give up any of the dividends for housekeeping, Lettice, so you see, if you go to Eastbourne, and he spends a little money on you, it will be something gained. He can't run into debt there."

"It's hateful!" said Myrtle. "We two are as well as possible. Now, you and Dame Durden really want a change."

"I am going to have one," said Dolly, frankly. "I don't want papa to know, so you must keep it a secret. I am going to leave the Rookery."

"Oh, Dolly, who is it? Have we ever seen him?"

"You absurd children. I believe your mind runs on nothing but matrimony," said Dolly, with a blush. "I'm only going into lodgings because papa says I have a temper; and I can help Dame Durden better if I'm away."

It was the first time within the memory of the girls that any of the "children" had accompanied Mr. Truscot on his trips for "change of air;" but to see the faces of the two who were to enjoy that honour, you would have thought they were victims going to be left at home in disgrace.

## CHAPTER II.

An old country house somewhere in the heart of the Midlands. A stately mansion which had been in the family of the present owner for centuries, which, though not entailed, had descended from father to son in unbroken succession since the days of the second Charles, and which Sir Geoffrey Pierrepont, baronet, loved better than anything in the world.

But then, poor old man, he had no very close ties of family or kindred. Twice married, he was now a childless widower. His only sister had married against his wishes, and been renounced by him on the spot; and the only creature for whom he seemed to display any affection was his namesake and godson, Geoffrey Carlyle, his first wife's nephew, who, being left an orphan, had come to the Manor a boy of ten, and ever since been regarded as a son of the house; even during the brief sway of the second Lady Pierrepont, a gentle, sweet-tempered woman, who "took to" Geoff on the spot, and loved him dearly.

It was August; the very same August in

which Horace Truscot showed his selfishness by retaining all his dividends and leaving his thirteen olive branches to shift for themselves. Mr. Carlyle had come down to the Manor a few days before, and he and his uncle were discussing the local news, the crops, the tenants, and the general well-being of the estate; for Sir Geoffrey was his own agent, and knew all the concerns of every man who rented under him.

A pause came at last. Carlyle tossed away the end of his cigar, they had both been smoking, and looked for a moment beyond the terrace on to the picturesque gardens now in all their summer beauty bathed in the soft silvery moonlight.

"I don't wonder you're proud of the place, Uncle Geoff," he said, slowly. "I've been about a good deal in England and abroad, but I never saw a spot I liked so well."

Sir Geoffrey seemed well pleased.

"It's not every place has had such good fortune," he said, cheerfully. "The land was given by Charles the Second to the first baronet, who built this house; and if you'll believe me, though the estate was not entailed it's gone from father to son ever since. There never was a spendthrift Pierrepont, and each one took it for granted his successor would keep as straight as he had done, so there were no conditions, no restrictions; and now, at sixty, I'm the last of my race, and there's not a Pierrepont to come after me."

"You might marry again," suggested Geoff, touched by the sadness in his uncle's tone.

"Thank you, I am not such a fool. I was a young man when I proposed to your aunt; it was a love match, and neither of us repented it. I was forty-five when I married my second wife, a gentle creature who wasn't afraid of a husband ten years her senior; but at sixty no one would have me except for my wealth and position, and I don't feel inclined to be taken for them, so I shall just bide as I am; and if only you're sensible, Geoff, you will be master of Pierrepont Manor when I'm gone."

"You may live another twenty years yet," said Carlyle, cheerfully.

"Very likely," assented the baronet. "The Pierreponts often see eighty, but settling my affairs won't cut me off any quicker; and I've made up my mind of one thing—happen what will, my sister's husband shall never have the chance of ruling here."

"If you pass over your sister you ought to remember her children," said Geoff, thoughtfully. "I think you said she had some?"

"Half a dozen," returned the old gentleman, half a dozen in seven years, and I should say she had a hard job to provide for them; but that's not my business, she would marry the fellow, and must abide by the consequences."

"What was wrong with him?" demanded Geoffrey. "You always abuse your brother-in-law, uncle, but I have no idea what his offence consisted of. Was he a gambler or a drunkard?"

"He was neither. He was nothing at all. He pretended to write poetry, but it was never published; he was a limp sort of fellow with no back-bone, and what a pretty girl like Lettice could see in him always puzzled me."

"Was he a gentleman?"

"Oh dear, yes," retorted Sir Geoffrey, "and a very poor one. He thought honest work *infra dig*, and relied on help from grand relations; but they didn't see keeping him in idleness, so they gave him the cold shoulder, and I don't suppose they have seen any more of him than I have."

Carlyle smiled.

"If they are poor, it says something in their favour that all these years they have never come to you for help."

"I suppose it does," admitted the Baronet, rather reluctantly; "but there, Geoff, it's a sore subject, and I don't want to talk about it. I'd much rather discuss your prospects. It was a great blow to me when you took up scribbling; but prose is better than poetry any day, and so long as you don't take to verse writing I'll forgive you."

"Poems and love stories are quite out of my line," replied Mr. Carlyle. "Essays and an account of my travels are all I have ever perpetrated, and neither are thus far particularly remunerative."

"Well, you don't need to earn your own living," declared his uncle. "Your father left you five hundred a-year, and I am quite willing to double your income if you'll only marry and settle down like a Christian."

"I don't think I'm a marrying man," said Geoff, lightly. "I hate fashionable girls!"

Sir Geoffrey groaned. "I don't mind about your wife being fashionable; but for Heaven's sake don't marry a girl who believes in women's rights, and wears cropped hair and spectacles. I'd sooner you kept as you are."

"I don't admire cropped hair and spectacles any more than you do, Uncle Geoff."

"There was Meta Lascelles," said the old gentleman, regretfully. "I shall never believe you couldn't have had her if you'd been prompt enough."

Geoff shook his head.

"Meta is the nicest woman I ever knew, and I believe she was very fond of me as a cousin; but she fell in love with Lascelles the first time they met, and no one else would have had the ghost of a chance."

"But she's a widow now."

"And nicer than ever," admitted Geoff; "but you see, uncle, I'm foolish enough to want a wife who loves me if I ever do marry, and poor Meta has done her loving."

"It was hard lines on her his dying," said the Baronet, sympathetically, "just as he was getting on, and he left her very badly provided for."

"He left her not provided for at all," corrected Geoff. "When the bills were paid she had nothing in the world but the house—which fortunately was their own—and furniture."

"And two children."

"Three. She takes boarders and does all kinds of work in her spare time to make both ends meet. She wouldn't let me help her though I wanted to. It makes a man feel ashamed of himself to have plenty of money while a woman like that toils for her daily bread."

"We'd better go and board with her," said Sir Geoffrey, gravely. "I wish I had thought of it before. There is nothing to do here till the shooting. We'll take all her best rooms and pay liberally."

"August is an awfully bad time for the suburbs," said Geoff, thoughtfully. "You see, everyone who possibly can goes off to the seaside. I shouldn't wonder if poor Meta had an empty house for the next six weeks."

"We'll start to-morrow," said Sir Geoffrey, who was always impulsive.

"You'd better write first or let me," counselled his nephew; "and you know, uncle, she is dreadfully proud. It won't do for her to think we offer to go to her as a favour."

"You can tell her the country is awfully dull, and that I really want to get away that the place may be turned inside out ready for the first. You see, I'm not her uncle, so the letter will come better from you."

Geoff wrote to his cousin before he went to bed, and his letter was delivered the following afternoon at a very quaint, picturesque house at Putney, when the neat-looking servant carried it out to her mistress, who sat in the shady garden dispensing afternoon tea to the young lady who just then was her solitary "inmate," a girl in a quiet grey dress, with large blue-grey eyes, and the sweetest face to be found in a day's journey.

"It was just a Providence your coming to me now, Dolly," Mrs. Lascelles was saying. "I always get moody and desponding when the house is empty, and your society is simply invaluable."

For Mr. Truscot's second daughter had carried out her threat. The very day her parents left for Eastbourne, Dolly had gone to Mrs. Lascelles whom she knew from meet-

ing her at the Juddkins', and had asked shyly, if her friend could tell her of any rooms.

"I must leave home," she said, simply, "for Kitty is getting just worn out, and I want to be free to give up all my time to my work, so that I may be able to take her for a long holiday. I can't afford anything very expensive, and I haven't an idea where to go. The few houses I have asked at only take 'City gents,' and seem to think no one else has a right to want lodgings."

"Would you like to come here?"

"Here!" exclaimed Dolly. "It would be like Paradise; but, Mrs. Lascelles, I could never pay you enough. I hoped to get something for thirty shillings a week."

"Well, dear, if you like to come here, I can take you for that. There is a little room which used to be the nursery, where you can write in peace and quietness; and when your sister comes to see you, you shall have your tea together and talk to your hearts' content."

"But—"

"It will quite pay me," said Meta, simply, "and I would much rather have you than some terrible old maid with whims enough to drive me crazy."

She had not lived at Putney for three years without making a tolerably large circle of acquaintances. Most of these, like her late husband, were of literary tastes, and from one or two of them she had heard Dolly Truscot's story; or sufficient of it to enable her to read between the lines of the girl's confidence and guess what she left unsaid.

Pretty, energetic Mrs. Lascelles, had scant pity for Horace Truscot, and she guessed how much Dolly had suffered before she revolted so far as to leave his roof. She was pleased to be able to make things a little smoother for the bright-eyed girl, and so Dolly went home with the understanding she was to return with her goods and chattels the next day. Dame Darden went with her, and when Meta saw the worn, patient face, her heart warmed to her at once.

"I'll take great care of your sister, Miss Truscot," she said, kindly. "We seem like old friends already through Mrs. Juddkins. And I will try to make her feel at home here. You must come and see her as often as you can."

The tears were in Dame Darden's eyes.

"I think Dolly is quite right to leave home; but—we have never been separated before."

"Well, it is not far across the bridge to the Rookery," said Mrs. Lascelles, "and young things must try their wings. I think she will be able to devote herself more to her work here than as one of a large family."

Dame Darden and Dolly sat down side by side on the little white bed in the author's room. Now that it had come to say good-bye both their hearts were full. It might, as Mrs. Lascelles said, be a short distance from Putney to Fulham, but the actual parting was the same as though there had been miles between the two places. Dolly was the braver of the two. Perhaps it is always easier to leave than to be left.

"Promise me," she pleaded, "not to worry. Just let things slide. If the tradespeople want money give them papa's address. Do just for once let him feel he is the responsible person and not you."

"But when the crisis comes," asked Dame Darden, "what then?"

"It won't come till they are back from Eastbourne," said Dolly, hopefully; "and then you must just let papa see everyone. Show them all in to the study, from the butcher's boy to the tax-collector."

"Dolly, it would kill him."

Dorothy shook her head.

"He is not ill really, Dame Darden. The doctor himself told mamma papa only wanted rousing. Don't you remember how indignant she was. Most likely the worry will act as a kind of tonic, and make him look out for a situation. Anyway we must try."

And now Dolly had been nearly a week at

Elmhurst. She was as perfectly at home with Mrs. Lascelles as though she had known her all her life, and was even permitted to share the widow's anxieties as day after day passed and no one applied to join the family circle.

Mrs. Lascelles could take ten guests, though her usual number was eight. At the end of July there had been a general exodus from the pleasant old-fashioned house; and she was very much afraid her rooms would remain empty till September or October.

"Is it good news?" Dolly felt emboldened to ask when Mrs. Lascelles opened Mr. Carlyle's letter, and read it with a smiling face.

"First-rate. My cousin and his uncle want to come here at once. Sir Geoffrey is a dear old man. He insists he shall not come unless I let him pay handsomely. It will be almost like old times to see him again. I only wish"—and her face flushed—"he could come just as a guest; but then he is so kind I know he won't let the taking his money make any difference in his friendship for me."

"Is he your uncle?"

"No, he's Geoff's uncle, not mine. Geoff and I are first cousins. He's a good fellow, but just a little spoilt by having life made too easy for him. He writes a little, travels a great deal, and is altogether a very pleasant companion. Did you never meet him, Dolly? he used to be at the Juddkins' a good deal."

"You forget you haven't told me his name?" objected Dolly.

"How stupid of me—Geoffrey Carlyle!"

Dolly put her teaspoon down on the bamboo table. It seemed to need a great deal of attention; but at last she answered slowly,—

"I met a Mr. Carlyle once, and so Dolly took the idea he was a lawyer."

"He's nothing, unfortunately. I don't mean he's idle. He's most fearfully energetic, and works hard; but he has no regular profession."

"And when are they coming?"

"To-morrow, unless I telegraph that I have no room for them. I don't think," and she smiled cheerfully, "there is any chance of my doing that."

In the cool of the evening, when her work's writing for the day was over, Dorothy walked over Putney bridge to the quiet old-fashioned corner of Fulham where the Rookery stood. She went through the broken gate up the weed-strewn avenue, the contrast between the desolation of her home and the trim cared for aspect of Elmhurst striking her at every turn. The children were playing at hide and seek; Dame Darden, with her eternal mending, sat in an arbour.

"How well you look!" she cried, affectionately. "Dolly, I think Mrs. Lascelles must be a magician. It can't be the change from Fulham to Putney which has worked the spell."

Dorothy smiled.

"I feel as strong as a horse," she said, frankly. "You see, Kitty, no one worries me. I work for four hours in the morning without a single interruption, and then I feel as if the rest of the day belonged to myself; but have you heard from Eastbourne?"

"Yes."

"What a doleful yes. Do tell me just what was in the letter. I feel sure it wasn't a pleasant one."

"I took your advice exactly, Dolly. Whenever anyone brought a bill or asked for money I gave them papa's address, and said they had better write to him. I expect they did write, and that he got several letters by the same post, for this is what I got to-day."

Dorothy Truscot could not help smiling as she read the calm way in which her father turned his responsibilities over to his children.

"DEAR KATHLEEN,—"

"I had nine duns this morning. It is most undutiful of you to let the tradespeople have my address, knowing I had come away for rest and change. The debts, of course,



are your affair, not mine. If you absolutely cannot meet them, you had better apply to Dorothy. In any case, do not let me be troubled further in the matter.—Your affectionate father, "HORACE TRUSCOT."

In the same envelope was another letter which had been sealed up to secure it from paternal eyes.

"DEAR DAME DURDEN,—

"Whatever have you been doing to offend the pater? He is simply furious, and goes about comparing himself to King Lear. Mother says you are breaking her heart, but she seems much as usual, so don't fret about it. Letty and I are longing to come home, for it is fearfully dull, and papa is always talking at us because we eat so much. Things are so dear that he won't be able to stay the whole month, unless you send him some money. I wouldn't if I were you. Do take care of yourself, dear Dame.—Your loving

"MYRTLE."

"And they are" actually staying at an hotel," said Dolly, awe-struck.

"I think that is what exasperated the tradespeople," said Dame Durden. "One of them said if papa could afford to go to a fashionable hotel, he ought to pay his debts."

"Well," said Dorothy, simply, "I don't think he'll find the law considers his debts your affair, Dame. If he's awfully cross when he gets home, you'll just have to come and stay at Elmhurst; Mrs. Lascelles is as kind as possible."

"Are there any fresh people?"

"Two are coming to-morrow—Mr. Carlyle and his uncle."

"What, your Mr. Carlyle? Oh, Dolly!"

"He isn't my Mr. Carlyle, or anyone else's. Isn't it odd he is Mrs. Lascelles' first cousin? And she seems fond of him."

### CHAPTER III.

"SIR GEOFFREY, this is my dear little friend Dorothy Truscot. Geoff, I think you have met Miss Truscot before."

Such was Mrs. Lascelles' introduction when Dolly came into the dining-room the following evening in her quiet, grey gown, with a bunch of red carnations at her throat.

Mr. Carlyle took the girl's hand frankly, and expressed the pleasure he felt in seeing her again. His uncle stared at poor Dolly deliberately through his gold-rimmed eyeglasses before he asked, shortly,—

"Any relation to Horace Truscot of the Rookery, young lady?"

Dolly started.

"I am his daughter, Sir Geoffrey. Is it possible you know papa?"

"I haven't seen him more than half-a-dozen times. I used to know a member of his family very well."

Dolly smiled.

"Oh, that must have been one of our rich relations," she said, calmly. "I believe papa has some, but we don't, any of us, know them."

"Whatever for?" demanded the Baronet, as they sat down to supper. Dolly was opposite him, so he could watch her face. "It's not a good thing to drop your family, Miss Truscot."

Mr. Carlyle thought privately his uncle's practice was very different to his precept.

"You don't understand," said Dolly, laughing, "we haven't declined the honour of knowing the rich Truscots. Only they think it's better not to know us lest we should presume on the relationship. They are probably prudent folks who think that a man with thirteen children can't be a very safe acquaintance."

"Thirteen children! Good gracious!" exclaimed the Baronet; "and all alive?"

"All alive!" exclaimed Dolly. "We have

not much to boast of in other things, Sir Geoffrey, but we all enjoy the best of health. Except the twins, who have a painful habit of catching every childish epidemic which appears in the neighbourhood, not one of the thirteen has ever needed a doctor."

"Dear me," said Sir Geoffrey, politely, "you can't be much of a gain to the medical men in your vicinity."

"I thought Mr. Truscot was very delicate," said Carlyle, quietly.

"My father is always ailing," admitted Dolly, "but he never gets any worse, and I am afraid we have all got used to looking on him as an invalid."

"He can't be an old man," objected the Baronet. "Why should he be always ailing?"

"He is forty-seven. He says himself he has never got over the shock of the twins' birth, and that finding himself at forty the father of thirteen children was too much for him."

The conversation drifted to other subjects. Dolly soon perceived that Mrs. Lascelles would have a "good time" during her cousin's visit. Sir Geoffrey spoke of two or three theatres he wished to visit, planned a day's picnic on the Thames, and various other delights, and he seemed to take it as a matter of course his hostess should enjoy a share of his amusements.

"That's a pretty child," he said, when Dolly had retired to her own room. "What on earth is she doing here Meta?"

Meta laughed at the point-blank question.

"Dolly earns her own living, and she boards with me because she found her time too much distracted by domestic duties at home."

"Ugh—what does she do?"

"Don't tell him, Meta," implored her cousin. "Uncle Geoff has such a horror of literary ladies he's capable of cutting little Miss Truscot on the spot."

"She's not a literary lady," said the Baronet with decision, "she's a mere child."

"She's twenty-three," replied Meta Lascelles, "and she earns her living by writing stories. Very pretty ones they are too."

"She'd better stay at home and make the puddings—they must want large ones for thirteen children."

"But that wouldn't be so remunerative. Mr. Truscot's income is only two hundred a year so some of his children must earn something."

"Aren't there any sons?"

"Four, and two of them are out in the world, but Dolly is the only one of the nine daughters able to keep herself."

When the two gentlemen were alone in the cosy den which had been given up to them for a smoking-room, the Baronet said suddenly,—

"That's a pretty little girl, Geoff."

"Miss Truscot is more than pretty. She's the sweetest woman I ever met."

"Well, please don't fall in love with her," adjured his uncle. "I want to see you married badly enough, but you mustn't hamper yourself with eight sisters-in-law. It would never do."

Geoffrey Carlyle had never forgotten Dolly, they had met but once, just as the Jackins were leaving London, thus cutting off the chance of their acquaintance ripening under the roof of the kindly editor. The little girl in the limp, white muslin and shabby waterproof cloak had lingered in Geoff's mind as no other woman's face had done; but he was not in the least in love with her, he told himself, and his uncle's warning was not in the least necessary. He would have been somewhat amused if he could have seen Sir Geoffrey chuckling to himself in his own room as though enjoying some capital joke, while he muttered,—

"Well, she's a nice little girl, whoever her father is; and—there's nothing like a little wholesome opposition!"

Mrs. Lascelles found time very pleasant after Sir Geoffrey and his namesake came to Elmhurst. It was soon an understood thing

that she was engaged by household duties, and Dolly by literary labours until the early dinner, but after that their companionship was eagerly claimed by the Baronet, who got up some pleasant excursion almost every day, and simply insisted on their joining in it.

"I'm an old man, my dear," he told Dolly one day, when she had ventured to remonstrate at some generosity on his part, "and I've no daughters of my own to make happy, so it would be very hard if I might not try and give my young friends a little pleasure."

"I think your daughters would be very happy girls," said Dolly, looking at him with a grateful glance from her grey-blue eyes, "you are so very kind!"

"I hope you'll always think so," said Sir Geoffrey, gravely. "Do you know, Miss Dorothy, I'd a wholesome dread of women who wrote till I knew you!"

"Most men have. I never can understand why."

"Oh! it's very natural. I wish you'd tell me now what made you write—what put it into your head first of all?"

The girl smiled.

"A very unromantic reason, I'm afraid, Sir Geoffrey. I wanted to earn money."

"I hope you are not mercenary?"

"I don't think so! It was three years ago; papa had been ill, money was very scarce. Dame Darden—that's my eldest sister—went about with a pile of bills which couldn't be paid, looking quite wretched, and I felt someone must do something."

"And then—"

"I could only think of three things. I was not accomplished enough to be a governess; my temper was too quick to be a Lady Help. Besides, it would have cost a sovereign or so for advertisements if I'd tried to get a post as either. My purse—don't laugh, Sir Geoffrey—had just half-a-crown in it. I would not ask the Dame to lend me anything, in case I should fail; and it wasn't much capital to start me in life, though one does hear of men who become millionaires after coming to London with just half-a-crown in their pocket!"

"And what did you do with your capital?"

"I bought five quires of sermon paper, a blotting book, a bottle of ink, and two cork penholders. Then I shut myself up in my own room and—wrote a story."

"And sold it!"

"Well, it's very odd, but I did. I think my first must have been accepted just to encourage me for the next which came back time after time, like a bad halfpenny, and often after that I was near giving it up in despair; but I'm glad now I kept on."

"Then you have succeeded?"

"I can earn enough to keep myself and Kitty if she would let me, but she won't leave home."

"Do you think you are right to ask her?" demanded Sir Geoffrey, rather severely. "I daresay she is a great comfort to your parents."

"Well, I think she spoils them!"

Sir Geoffrey looked so bewildered, that Dorothy explained.

"Papa never does anything at all but complain of his own sufferings; Mamma never does anything but pity him; Kitty has to do her best to fill both their places, and she is just killing herself over it."

"I should like to see her," said the Baronet thoughtfully. "Will you take me to call on her, Miss Dolly?"

"I'll take you with pleasure; but you had much better not come. The Rookery is not like Elmhurst."

"Variety is charming."

"You don't understand. Mrs. Lascelles is poor; but she cares for home, and takes a pride in working to beautify it. At the Rookery everything is neglected. My writing takes all my time. Kitty is always mending the children's clothes, and so everything else goes to the wall."

"I understand," said the Baronet, cheerfully; "and I should still like to see your

sister if you will take me to call on her this afternoon."

But one person was not at all pleased by this arrangement. Mr. Carlyle watched the pair start with a very gloomy face.

"Meta," he said to his cousin, with something like a groan, "I've made a terrible mistake."

Mrs. Lascelles stared.

"Don't look so wretched, Geoff, but just tell me what you mean. We have been so nearly brother and sister all our lives that surely you can trust me."

"I'd trust you sooner than anyone in the world, dear; but can't you see what's happened?"

"I thought until to-day that you had fallen in love with Dorothy Truscot. I suppose, with your prospects, people would say you might do better, but I shouldn't call it a terrible mistake."

"I have loved her ever since we first met. I'd marry her if she'd thirty brothers and sisters instead of twelve; but can't you see I have a rival?"

For a moment Mrs. Lascelles looked utterly bewildered; then, as his meaning broke on her, she burst out laughing.

"Geoff, I believe you are thinking of your uncle. Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I should be very angry with you if I didn't see that the presence of the green-eyed monster is just another proof you really are in love."

"You don't understand," said Geoff, hopelessly. "The dear old boy was worrying me not before he came here to find a wife. He was always harping on the subject, Meta. Well, I told him if he was so anxious to see a mistress at Pierpoint Manor he'd better marry again himself. He pretended then to think he was too old; but since he came here, he's always praising Dolly, and I feel quite sure he means to make her Lady Pierpoint."

"If you let him."

"Then you believe it?"

"I don't believe it the least in the world. I think Sir Gregory is far too wise to make love to a girl young enough to be his grandchild; but if he did, you need not be afraid, for Dorothy would never marry where she did not love. If you can win her heart she would be true to you in spite of all the baronets in the world."

"I shall speak to my uncle."

"You'd much better not."

"Why?"

"Because, as I've just explained to you, you're making an egregious mistake, and Sir Gregory would only laugh at you."

"But—"

Meta looked at him with a strange smile. It was not seven years since her own romance had ended in a wedding-ring; perhaps she was thinking of her own love story.

"Dolly is a darling," she said at last, "and if you can win her you will be a lucky man, even though Truscot *père* is, I believe, enough to try the patience of Job. You will have to share your wife, and probably your home, with any number of little Truscots. You will be expected to lend a hand in planting them out in life, and I daresay to bear with your father-in-law would need a heap of patience; but for all that, Geoff, I believe you will be a lucky fellow if Dorothy will have you, and I for one shall wish you joy."

The Truscots had nothing snobbish about them; and so having once warned Sir Geoffrey of the discomforts of her home, Dolly said never another word about the family poverty, but walked along with the old gentleman as naturally as though it was the most usual thing for the Rookery to receive a titled visitor.

The old gate seemed more rickety on its hinges than ever, and when the twins ran up to greet her at the beginning of the avenue, she could have wished they had not been just allaying their hunger with bread and treacle, which refreshment had left a sticky mark on their faces apparent to the most casual eyes.

"Speak to the gentleman," she pleaded, as Sir Geoffrey put out a hand which seemed overlooked.

"What's he come for?" asked Jill, in a shrill childish treble. "Is he the tax man? He came yesterday, Dolly, and made Dame Darden cry?"

Dolly blushed crimson, but the old baronet came to her assistance.

"I've only come to see your eldest sister," he said, kindly; "and I never make anyone cry. Will you buy yourself a wax dolly next time you go out, to remember me by?" and he slipped into her chubby hand a bright half-sovereign, which reduced her to such bewildered joy that she was absolutely speechless.

"Where's Kitty?" asked Dorothy. "In the arbour? Run on then, Jack, and tell her we're coming."

But Jack, perhaps with hopes of a gift like Jill's, kept close at Sir Geoffrey's side, and while his little sister sped on the errand, he began to give Dorothy a summary of the family news.

"Papa and mamma are coming home to-morrow," he said, rather dejectedly. "We hoped they'd stay away much longer. Letty's not coming; she's 'better off.'"

"What do you mean, Jack?" cried Dolly, anxiously, with a vague dread, for she had so often heard those words "better off" applied to the dead; that she could not grasp the child's meaning.

"She's 'better off,'" repeated Jack, stolidly; "the letter didn't say any more."

Kathleen Truscot received her stranger guest with simple grace. Sir Geoffrey saw at a glance poverty had set a harder grip on her than on Dorothy. Hard times and short means had given Dolly much of her quaint originality, and helped to make her what she was, but with Kathleen their effect had been to crush her into a kind of patient nonentity whom strangers would never have suspected of possessing intellectual gifts really as fine and keen as her sister's.

"I used to know a member of your family some years ago," Sir Geoffrey told Kitty, "and I asked your sister to bring me to call on you."

"Sit down and talk to Dame Darden, Sir Geoffrey," said Dolly, frankly, "while I go upstairs for some of my belongings. I believe I fetch something every time I come over."

Left alone, the old man looked thoughtfully into Kathleen's face.

"You are very like your mother," he said, gently.

"Papa always says I take after her family," agreed Kitty. "Dolly is like the Truscots."

"You must miss her very much; she is such a little sunbeam."

Nothing pleased the Dame better than to sing the praises of her favourite sister.

"Dolly is the flower of the flock," she answered. "I miss her dreadfully; but I think it was right for her to go."

"I can't understand why. Surely she could have looked herself up in an empty room and written her stories."

"It wasn't that," Kathleen flushed painfully. "Dolly went away because she said it was better for things to come to a crisis, and then papa must wake up to his responsibilities."

"I can't make out how a man with thirteen children can need waking up."

"You must not blame him too much. He had a serious illness some time ago, and he has believed himself an invalid ever since."

"A 'malade imaginaire.'"

"Something like it. I suppose life here was dull and monotonous, and he grew tired of poverty, so instead of fighting against troubles he just sank under them. Dolly thinks a sudden shock may rouse him."

"And you?"

She shook her head.

"I don't feel hopeful. I think I understand papa better than Dolly does. I believe he

can't help believing he is ill; and that he really honestly does believe it."

"This is his own house, I think? I remember hearing so when he was first married."

"Yes—my uncle, Sir Ashley Truscot offered to buy it once, but papa refused."

"Do you ever see Sir Ashley?"

"We have none of us set eyes on him for twenty years. I believe he was my godfather, and came to my christening; and at first papa used always to write to him when there was a new baby; but you see there were so many he got tired."

"And your mother's family?"

"Mamma was an orphan. I never even heard her maiden name, for she never talks about her early life."

"It was not a very happy one," said Sir Geoffrey, gravely; "family quarrels are always painful. Believe me, Miss Truscot, there are worse troubles in the world than poverty."

"It seems hard to realize it," said Dame Darden gently.

"I should like to know how you came by your name, if you will pardon an old man's curiosity," said Sir Geoffrey.

"Papa gave it me when I was quite small. I believe I had a trick of ordering the others about, and by the time I was ten years old there were six little ones. I think he recalled the old rhyme, 'Dame Darden had three serving men!'"

Sir Geoffrey, whose memory was wonderful for his years, thought a little pityingly of the end of the old glee, "but there was no one to kiss Dame Darden." Had that too come true of Horace Truscot's eldest daughter? Probably, for she really looked, poor girl, too weighed down by family cares to have had time for a romance of her own in her life.

"I am going away very soon," he said presently, when he and Dolly had risen to return to Elmhurst, "and I may not be able to come over to the Rookery again. I am very pleased to have seen you, Miss Truscot. Will you do me a favour? My name may have painful associations for your parents, since I last saw them, when they were in great trouble, so kindly do not tell them that you have made acquaintance with Sir Geoffrey Pierpoint."

Dame Darden promised. She walked down to the gate with her sister and the baronet, feeling as though the kind old man's visit had acted as a tonic to her weary brain and troubled heart.

#### CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LASCELLES' opinion had by no means convinced Geoffrey Carlyle that his fears of his uncle as a rival were unfounded. Meta might be right in saying Dolly would never marry a man she did not love, but then what was there to prevent her loving the noble-looking generous old baronet, who paid her such marked attention, and seemed always trying to give her pleasure.

Besides Meta did not know Uncle Geoff's devotion to Pierpoint Manor, and how he yearned to see his beautiful old home with a mistress. No; it had been a terrible mistake first of all to suggest to the baronet he should marry again; and a still greater one to keep back the secret that his nephew's one wish was to marry Dolly himself.

"You look grave, my boy," said Sir Geoffrey, heartily, that same night over their cigars. "Anything gone wrong?"

Carlyle shook his head. He was a reserved, sensitive nature. He could not bring himself to accuse his uncle of trying to win Dolly's heart. He set to work in a round about fashion.

"Did you have a pleasant walk this afternoon, sir?"

"Delightful, and my visit was only just in time. Mr. and Mrs. Truscot return to the Rookery to-morrow."

"Well!" and Geoff looked straight into



his uncle's face. "I suppose you'll have to make their acquaintance some time or other, that is if you're really going on with it."

"I'm certainly going on with my friendship for Miss Dolly," returned Sir Geoffrey, "why should I not?"

"No reason in the world, sir," replied Carlyle. "Only after our conversation that last night at the Manor, it seems odd; but no doubt your views have changed."

"I'm not aware, Geoff, I ever announced an aversion to young ladies. I've always been fond of good girls or pretty ones, and Miss Dolly is both."

"You told me three weeks ago," persisted Geoff, "that you had not the least intention of marrying again. I believe you went so far as to say that at your time of life no woman would accept you except from mercenary motives."

The Baronet looked at his nephew for full five minutes in blank silence; then he sat down and positively chuckled, there is no other word for it.

"And you actually thought I meant to marry Dolly Truscot, a girl young enough to be my grandchild! Well, Geoff, it's one of two things: either you must be an awful fool yourself, or you must think me one!"

"Then it isn't true?"

"True!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey, still chuckling. "Of course it isn't true. I never thought of such a thing. I don't believe the idea would ever have entered anyone's head but yours."

"You warned me against falling in love with her, and I thought—"

"It seems to me you thought a great many foolish things. If you can get Dolly Truscot to be your wife, my lad, I'll welcome her gladly to Pierrepont Manor and start you in domestic life as becomes my heir; but if you'll take a word of advice from an old fellow who knows the world, you won't try your luck at present."

"Why ever not? We shall be leaving Elmhurst in a few days."

"Well, if you want reasons, here they are. Horace Truscot, Esquire, would like nothing better than living on a wealthy son-in-law. Once wait till the crisis in his affairs is past, and you'll have a chance of being left in peace; but if you come forward now he'll regard you as a sheer anchor or useful prop on to which he can hang the burden of the whole family. Besides, those two girls have been trying hard to rouse their father from his self-indolgent ways. Just give them a chance of seeing their desperate remedy succeed before you create a new sensation."

But though he spoke so prudently, the genial old man organised an expedition to see the fireworks at the Crystal Palace the following evening, and took entire charge of Mrs. Lascelles, thus leaving the younger pair to their own devices. He even took Meta so far from her little friend that Dolly and his nephew were practically alone.

"How long are you going to stay at Elmhurst?" Geoff asked the girl suddenly.

"I don't know. Papa is coming home to-day, and then I suppose something will be settled at home. I want to get Kitty away and give her a real holiday."

"You are very fond of your sister."

"I love Dame Darden better than anyone in the world."

"Dolly," and the young man's voice faltered, "do you think you could make room in your heart for me? Darling, I have loved you ever since the night of Mrs. Judkins' party, when we walked home together in the moonlight. Don't you think you could trust your happiness to me and become my wife?"

"Oh, I wish you hadn't said this," cried poor Dolly, sadly; "we were such friends, and have been so happy."

"Dolly, we shall be friends always," said the young man, earnestly, "however you decide; but if you have been happy with me, why won't you let me hope?"

"Because—you don't understand. You don't know papa."

"That can soon be remedied. I will call on Mr. Truscot as soon as you think he has recovered from the effects of his journey."

"Oh!" and Dolly wrung her hands, "why will you make me speak so plainly? You mustn't know papa. I can't be your wife, because, if I was, he would prey on you whenever he felt hard-up. He has blighted Kitty's life, he has goaded me on till I feel little better sometimes than a machine for earning money. If you were his son-in-law he would expect you to help him, and I think the degradation of it would kill me."

She was trembling with earnestness, and her voice was broken by something like a sob. Geoff led her to a seat far away from the neighbourhood of the fireworks display, and, therefore, deserted by the crowd. Here alone, with the blue sky above them, Geoff set himself to comfort the girl he loved.

"Dolly, tell me just this one thing. If it wasn't for the home troubles you would, could you, care for me?"

"I care now," she whispered, "and that only makes it harder; but I won't have your future blighted by such a burden. The children want so many things, and I must work for them. It's not their fault. They aren't old enough to help themselves. Geoff, I should hate myself if I went away to be happy without caring what became of them."

Geoff was stroking her soft hair caressingly.

"Look here, Dolly, my uncle is a very clever man of the world, and very fond of me. Now he wishes you to be my wife. Don't you think you might trust his judgment? He told me he would gladly receive you as his niece, only he advised me not to speak to Mr. Truscot until the crisis in his affairs had come. Uncle Geoff thinks even now at the eleventh hour your father may rouse himself."

"But if he doesn't?"

"Dolly, you are a veritable pessimist. Now look here, I won't have any 'ifs'; you are to promise to be my wife provided I don't claim you until things at the Rookery are more flourishing."

"Which means never," said Dolly, as she let her little hand slip into his. "We shall be engaged as long as Jacob and Rachel, and then you will grow tired of waiting, and I shall have turned into a sharp-tongued, fidgety old woman."

"One is just as likely as the other," said Geoff, cheerfully, "and I am quite content to take my chance."

Somehow they missed the Baronet and Mrs. Lascelles altogether, and got home at eleven to find the kind little widow really concerned at their delay.

"It was all my fault, Meta," said Carlyle, cheerfully; "and now, please, I want you both to congratulate me, for Dolly has promised to be my wife."

Dolly shook her head.

"He insisted on our being engaged," she said, simply; "but I told him it was all of no use. I shall never be able to desert the children; I must go on writing stories to keep them till they are old enough to help themselves."

"I think it a great deal of use, my dear," said Sir Geoffrey, kindly, "and I am very glad my boy has won your heart. Pierrepont Manor is a gloomy home without a mistress; but when I have you and Geoff there with me I shall be content."

## CHAPTER V.

THE family at the Rookery were divided in mind on the strange phrase in Mrs. Truscot's letter, "We are coming home without Letty, she is better off."

Jack and Jill, who had an intimate acquaintance with religious stories, in which "better off" invariably means taken from this lower world, were of opinion poor Letty was dead,

and had shed some very hearty tears on the subject.

Percy suggested that as his parents always said they had too many children, they must have sold Letty to some rich old person who had none.

Dame Darden was divided in mind, and not a little anxious, for though there were only five years between her and Letty, she always looked on the girl as one of her "children."

Punctually at five o'clock the cab stopped. It said a good deal for the domestic side of Mr. Truscot's character that none of the little ones clamoured to go and meet him.

With one accord they had all gathered in the nursery, and Dame Darden went downstairs alone to greet her parents.

"And Letty," she asked anxiously, before she inquired after Mr. Truscot's nerves or her mother's cold, "do tell me why you have not brought her?"

"She is better off," said Horace Truscot, bitterly. "I am aware you think I neglect my children, Kathleen; but I have done my utmost for Letty."

"You have behaved most generously, my dear love," said his wife.

Dame Darden, the long-suffering, the patient—Dame Darden, who might have passed for a feminine Moses, so meek was she, for once lost her temper under the long suspense; turning from her parents her eyes blazing with indignation, she appealed to Myrtle—who had been running backwards and forwards fetching parcels from the cab, and had just returned with her last load, her father's air-cushion.

"Myrtle," said her sister, in a strained, eager voice, "don't you torture me. Where is Letty?"

"She is quite well, Dame," cried Myrtle, setting her sister's mind at rest on the main point before going into details. "she wanted to write and ask your advice, but she had to decide in a hurry, and there was no time; still, surely you had my letter?"

"I burnt it," said Horace Truscot, quietly. "I don't see why Kathleen should usurp my place as head of the family."

"Oh, Dame Darden! dear Dame Darden! then you know nothing," and Myrtle seized her sister's hand as she plunged into the story. "At the same hotel had been staying a very rich American family, whose only daughter, a fragile girl of seventeen, had taken a desperate fancy to Letty. Nothing would please her but that her new friend should return with her to New York, and her father, Mr. Abraham B. Simons, had himself made the proposal to Mr. Truscot. They would take Letty as their own child, supply her with clothes, pocket-money, and every essential if she would bind herself to remain with them a year, at the end of which time, if she wished it, they would pay her passage home and send her under suitable escort to England."

"They let it till the last moment," said Myrtle, "for Mr. Simons only spoke one evening as they were leaving the next day, and poor Letty was nearly torn in two. She cried all night. At last I advised her to go. I said it was only a year, and that lots of people went to school abroad, and did not come home except once a year; and then I said I knew you'd think she'd done right, Dame, because they were going to give her music lessons and all sorts of advantages, so if she does come back she'll be able to earn her own living as a governess."

"Were they nice people, Myrtle?" asked Dame Darden; she was too hurt with her parents to address a single question now to them.

"Well," said eighteen-year-old Myrtle, thoughtfully, "they were very kind, and they have heaps of money, but they weren't like you, Dame Darden. They would have looked nothing at all without their grand clothes."

Kitty smiled at the compliment.

"You think they will be kind to Letty?"

"As kind as kind can be. That poor,

delicate invalid just worshipped her. I doubt if that girl'll live long, Dame, and then they'd turn to Lettice all the more. I don't expect, myself, she'll come home; she'll most likely marry Barney Simons, the eldest son, and turn into a real Yankee."

Dame Darden drew a long breath; it was better than she had expected. Perhaps it was as well there had been no time for Lettice to appeal to her eldest sister, for Kathleen's heart would have been torn in two. No doubt, in a pecuniary sense, Lettice was "better off," but it seemed, from Myrtle's story, like giving her up for ever.

"It's dreadful without her," sobbed Myrtle, when Dame Darden kissed her at bed-time; "Lettice was my own special sister, just as Dolly is yours. Dame, what would you do if Dolly went to America?"

Dame Darden declined to discuss the question. She had a dream of her own about Dorothy, and fancied Geoffrey Carlyle would soon persuade her pet to leave her, not for America, but for a distant country home; but she said nothing of this to Myrtle, but only suggested cheerfully that if Lettice did marry Mr. Barnaby Simons, there was nothing to prevent their coming to England for the honeymoon; and then, with a tender good-night, she left Myrtle to dream of that happy meeting, and went wearily to bed, not to sleep, but to ponder anxiously on the events of the following day, when it seemed likely the crisis in Mr. Truscot's affairs would come.

Led by Dolly, Dame Darden had gone on a totally new tack during her father's absence. Having no half-yearly allowance from her father that August, the housekeeping bills remained unpaid, and when the tradespeople remonstrated, she replied, quietly, they had better come and see Mr. Truscot on his return; he had gone away and left no ready money.

How many of the angry band would follow her advice and interview her father in the morning she could not think, but her directions to the little servant were very simple.

"If anyone asks for your master, show them straight into the study."

Between ten and twelve the baker, the butcher, the grocer, the oilshopman, and the dairy proprietor had all interviewed Mr. Truscot, had, one and all, announced their intention of summoning him if their accounts were not speedily settled.

The butcher was specially indignant.

"How a party which calls himself a gentleman can go off gallivanting to the seaside, leaving his just debts unpaid, and the brunt of it all to fall on his daughter, I can't say. However, Mr. Truscot, you'll get your meat elsewhere in future, or pay me ready money for it. Miss Truscot has paid for every mortal thing that come into the house since you went away. It's little enough she's had; I think the youngsters must have lived on oatmeal porridge, but that fare won't suit you."

Dinner time—a huge dish of salt herrings at one end of the table, a dish of hard dumplings at the other. Mrs. Truscot turned to her daughter reproachfully.

"Really, Kathleen, you should remember your dear father's delicate digestion; there is nothing here he can eat."

However, finding it was that or nothing, Horace Truscot contrived to put away a red herring very easily; but the lesson was not lost on him. That very afternoon he sent for Kathleen.

"Things can't go on like this."

"No," she said, gravely, "they can't. I have no money, and the credit is stopped."

"Where is Dorothy?"

"Staying with a lady in Putney. She will not come home till something is settled."

"Look here, Kathleen, we had better understand each other. There will be no more money till February, I can't live on red herrings till then."

"Can't you get a situation?"

"If I did, it would be paid quarterly, unless I took a place as copying clerk at a pound a

week. There is nothing for it, I must appeal to your uncle."

"Sir Ashley?"

"Oh no. He's three fast sons who drain him of every penny he has; I expect in his way he's as hard up as we are. I mean your mother's brother, Sir Geoffrey Pierrepont."

"Who?"

"Did you never hear of him? He's a regular old skinflint, positively rolls in money, and yet he has never given his sister a sixpence, just because he objected to her marrying me."

"Don't write to him," pleaded Dame Darden. "It would be like begging."

"Not write to him! Why, it's our one chance. He's ten thousand a year if he's a penny, and neither wife nor child. He cut up awfully rough at the time of the wedding; but he must come round when he hears how things are, he can't let his sister and her children starve."

"He knows how things are, or guesses; he was here two days ago."

"Here! Sir Geoffrey Pierrepont?"

"He is staying at the same house as Dolly. He came over with her to call. He told me he had known my mother long ago, and that I was like her. I never guessed he was her brother."

"Well, I shall write to him."

Dame Darden groaned.

"I am sure he will refuse. He did not look a man to be persuaded into anything."

But Mr. Truscot sent his letter, and the reply came by return of post.

"Before I agree to do anything for you, you must send me a list of your debts. I warn you if it is not a true one you will not see a penny of my money."

"He need not be afraid," said Truscot, sneeringly. "I'm not ashamed of my debts, they are all for the plain necessities of life, and three hundred will cover the lot."

He quite forgot this meant his income for eighteen months.

On the last day of August an old gentleman drove up to the Rookery and asked for Mr. Truscot. The valetudinarian felt rather abashed as he met his brother-in-law's keen, shrewd gaze. This was not a man either to cajole or hoodwink.

"Listen to me," said Sir Geoffrey, sternly, "and don't say a word till I've finished. Long ago I took an oath you should never touch a penny of my money, and I mean to keep it; but your children shall not be quite ruined because their father is an idle vagabond. I will pay your debts in full, giving my own obsequy to your creditors and taking their receipt. I will settle a thousand pounds on each of your children, the interest to be paid to you so long as they remain beneath your roof. Invested at four per cent. this will be forty pounds a-year a piece."

"Most generous," said Mr. Truscot, mentally deciding Dolly should come home at once, which would assure him the interest of ten portions.

"Stop a moment," said the Baronet, bluntly, "I've two or three conditions to make; first of all, your daughter Dorothy is engaged to my nephew and heir. It's to be an understood thing you don't prey on the young couple. They won't be very rich while I'm alive, and I should like them to enjoy their income in peace."

"But—"

"Don't interrupt me. Geoff and his wife will live with me, and as I don't want to be always a third party, I should like your eldest daughter to make her home with her sister. This will leave you eight children at home. With the interest of their portions and your own income you will have over five hundred a year, and on this you ought to be able to make both ends meet pretty comfortably, seeing you live rent-free."

"I am not an extravagant man," protested Horace Truscot, "but with thirteen children one's expenses are very heavy."

Sir Geoffrey looked at him coolly.

"Do you understand my terms? I will pay your debts and make this settlement on your children, provided you solemnly undertake not to prey on Dorothy and her husband."

"I don't want to prey on them," said the invalid testily. "Dorothy is the most undutiful of the whole thirteen, and she has contrived to make Kathleen nearly as bad as herself. I believe those two girls are utterly heartless."

"And I think them two of the sweetest girls I ever met. Well, Truscot, do we understand each other? From this day forward Dorothy and Kathleen are my children, not yours. As your two eldest sons are making their way in the world, and your third girl has been shipped off to America, the others must be quite youngsters."

But there was one dissentient voice to the proposed plan. Myrtle point-blank refused to be left at home, the eldest daughter of the house. Although she was her father's favourite, she revolted at the idea of in any way trying to fill Dame Darden's place.

"I should always be fretting after Kitty, and quoting what she did, till you hated the sight of me, papa. You shall keep my forty pounds a-year, and I'll be a pupil teacher in some good school."

This idea however was never carried out. After Dolly's marriage, while she and her husband were enjoying a long holiday in foreign lands, Myrtle was asked on a visit to the Manor to cheer up Dame Darden and Sir Geoffrey, and she attracted the notice of a wealthy Esquire whose estate joined the Baronet's. In a month he was desperately in love, and Mrs. Carlyle had to cut her honeymoon short to be at home in time for her sister's wedding. Myrtle was married from the Manor, and Mr. and Mrs. Truscot did not attend the ceremony.

By this time their family was reduced to seven, and as the eldest children at home were only thirteen and fourteen the valetudinarian began to consider whether he could not make a fresh start, and yet fill the part of head of his own family. Towards his elder olive branches, unjust as it may seem, he had always felt a kind of resentment. Those grown-up sons and daughters made him seem older than his years, he almost grudged them their youth and advantages; but with the younger ones it was different. Horace Truscot actually woke up from his long lethargy; he sold the Rookery, took a small farm far away from the scene of his failures, and actually by the time he was fifty had become quite an estimable member of society.

"It was all the girls' fault," Mrs. Truscot said to him, affectionately. "Kathleen and Dorothy pushed us aside and took our proper place. That is the worst of the present day young ladies, they are so fearfully energetic."

It was rank ingratitude, and Horace Truscot knew it. In his secret heart he was grateful to the two girls who for so long had borne his burdens and toiled for him; but he never loved them as he loved the younger children, who grew in time to look up to and respect him. Dame Darden's self-sacrificing patience was such a contrast to his own indolence as to make him feel ashamed, and a man never loves those who inspire him with that sentiment.

For a long while it seemed as though Sir Geoffrey's eldest niece would remain his constant companion, for the old rhyme still held good, "There was no one to kiss Dame Darden," in the sense of lover's kisses; that is, she had almost settled down into a maiden aunt, and Dorothy's children looked on her as their own special property, when quite suddenly a Colonial Bishop, visiting the neighbourhood, fell in love with her, and had the audacity—that was what Geoffrey Carlyle called it—to ask her to go out with him to his distant diocese and be a mother to his seven children.

"It was the children did it," Dolly said re-



gretfully; "the truth is, Dame Darden is never quite happy unless she is giving up herself for other people."

It was a very grand wedding. Sir Geoffrey settled five thousand on his favourite; and Mr. and Mrs. Truscot forgave the Dame sufficiently to come and see her converted into a wife.

But the mother could not help a word of disparagement of the child whose only fault was that she had been too patient.

"It's time she was married; she's thirty turned. I always did think Kathleen was out out for an old maid, but then being a second wife is not much better!"

Geoffrey Carlyle overheard this speech, and was ready with a retort.

"The Bishop is a good man, and devoted to Kathleen. Thirty is not old now-a-days. Perhaps, Mrs. Truscot, Dame Darden might have married ten years ago, if her whole time and thoughts had not been taken up with attending to your children."

Mrs. Truscot winced, the shaft had gone home.

"Well," she said, "with such a large family of course I need help. No mother could do everything for children who were 'thirteen to the dozen.'"

[THE END]

It is not difficult to tell whether rabbits are pursued by vermin. When rabbits are seen running and suddenly stopping to listen and then running on again and stopping they are pretty certain to have a weasel or a cat or a fox after them. They are not long-winded like hares and soon pant for want of breath. A weasel can always tire them out.

A BEAUTIFUL little insect, known as the "gipsy moth," was imported from Europe about three years ago by an enthusiastic entomologist of Massachusetts to add to his rare collection of living insects. After a few months the gipsy moth tired of its captivity, and being eager to view other parts of the State, watched his opportunity, and escaped. Since then the progeny of that gipsy moth has multiplied rapidly and destroyed various kinds of vegetation to the amount of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Legislature has already appropriated a sum equal to £35,000 for the payment of a Gipsy Moth Commission to hunt down the little insect and its younger relatives and slay them. Two hundred persons compose the force that is hunting the gipsy moth, and they have to not only examine trees and shrubs, but are obliged to overturn stones, examine stone walls, take down fences, and raze out-buildings, not to mention the investigation of old tin cans, which the female moth much effects.

The practice of the wife's assuming the husband's name of marriage, according to Dr. Brewster, originated from a Roman custom, and became the common custom after the Roman occupation. Thus Julia and Octavia, married to Pompey and Cicero, were called by the Romans Julia of Pompey, Octavia of Cicero, and in later times married women in most European countries signed their names in the same manner, but omitted the "of." Against this view may be mentioned that during the sixteenth and even at the beginning of the seventeenth century the usage seems doubtful, since we still find Catherine Parr so signing herself after she had been twice married, and we always hear of Lady Jane Grey, not Dudley, Arabella Stuart, not Seymour, etc. Some persons think that the custom originated from the Scriptural teaching that husband and wife are one. This was the rule of law so far back as Bracton (died 1268), and it was decided in the case of *Bon versus Smith*, in the reign of Elizabeth, that a woman by marriage loses her former name and legally receives the name of her husband. Altogether the custom is involved in much obscurity.

The manner in which men fall depends somewhat upon the nature of the action in which they are engaged. Nearly every one is familiar with the traditional stage fall, where the victim of a supposed death-shot strikes an attitude, claps his hand to his heart, stiffens every joint and muscle, breathes hysterically, and goes down like a log toppled over from one end. Another popular yet erroneous notion is that men shot through the vitals leap into the air and go down in a dramatic attitude. Sometimes men are found on the field in striking positions, but often an examination shows that the position was taken after the fall. As a rule, a man who is hit above the hips goes down. The slightest wound the more commotion, for the body instinctively resists, just as it does when one slips or is pushed or collides with some object. But a wound in a vital spot weakens the resistance, and men sink at once or reel and tumble with very little self-control.

ONE might smile, were it not so pitiable, to see the impatience with which a strong, active man succumbs to the necessity of lying a few weeks on a bed of sickness; the penitence which men in vain try to smother, at pills and potions, in place of their favourite dish or drink or cigar; the many orders they give and countermand, in the same breath, to the wife and mother, who calmly accepts all this as part of her woman lot, and who dare not, for the life of her, smile at the fuss this caged lion is making because his rations are cut off for a few days. This "being sick patiently" is a lesson we think man has yet to learn; but it is a good thing that "the lords of creation" are sometimes laid on the shelf awhile, that they may better appreciate the cheerful endurance with which the feeble wife-mother bears the household cares all the same—on the pillow where lies with her the newly born. Pain and weakness never interrupt her constant, careful forethought for her family. Husbands are too apt to take these everyday heroisms as matters of course. Therefore, we say again, it is well sometimes that their attention should be awakened to it, when the doctor has vetoed for them for a while the office and the counting room, and they are childishly frantic at cruel and closed blinds.

THE great violin-makers all lived within the compass of 150 years. They chose their wood from a few great timbers felled in the South Tyrol, and floated down in raft, pine and maple, sycamore, pear, and ash. They examined these to find streaks and veins and freckles, valuable superficially when brought out by varnishing. They learned to tell the density of the pieces of wood by touching them; they weighed them, they struck them, and listened to judge how fast or how slow, or how resonantly they would vibrate in answer to strings. Some portions of the wood must be porous and soft, some of close fibre. Just the right beam was hard to find; when found, it can be traced all through the violins of some great master, and after his death in those of his pupils. The piece of wood was taken home and seasoned, dried in the hot Brescia and Cremona sun. The house of Stradivari, the great master of all, is described as having been as hot as an oven. The wood was there soaked through and through with sunbines. In this great heat the oils thinned and simmered slowly, and penetrated far into the wood, until the varnish became a part of the wood itself. The old violin-makers used to save every bit of the wood when they found what they liked, to mend and patch and inlay with it. So vibrant and so resonant is the wood of good old violins, that they murmur, and echo, and sing in answer to any sound where a number of them hang together on the wall, as if rehearsing the old music that once they knew. It was doubtless owing to this fact that when the people could not account for Paganini's wonderful playing, they declared that he had a human soul imprisoned in his violin; for his violin sang and whispered, even when all the strings were off.

## HILDBRED ELSINORE.

### CHAPTER XXI.

HUGH TREFUSIS walked away from Mr. Warrington's chambers with a strange sadness at his heart. He could not bear to think that she was really dead, the pretty little girl whom he had seen only last summer so full of life and gladness. And what had killed her? Why had her kind relations in Daffodil-road had no tidings of her illness? No wonder the news of her sudden death had come as a shock.

Hugh was conscious of another thing on this bright December day. The quest he had promised Mrs. Smith to undertake, though it had lost all personal interest for him, must still be accomplished. Every word she had said about Guy Bertram, every doubt she had expressed of his being the real Bertram mentioned in Lady Tempest's will, was true still.

Hugh felt he could never take the "Squire's" hand in friendship again until he had set this matter at rest for ever. Hildred was dead, but if the property had been really hers, it was now her father's, at least the Captain supposed so—his ideas of law were rather vague, though his father was a famous solicitor—and the matter ought to be thoroughly sifted. He had got so far in his meditations when he was interrupted by a friendly greeting—

"What, up in town again! Really, you soldiers have an easy time of it."

The speaker was Adam West. Hugh had told Mrs. Smith his father knew the firm of Williams and West intimately. He had not thought it necessary to mention his own slight acquaintance with the junior partner. A sudden inspiration seized on Hugh—

"Mr. West, I wish you'd let me come to your office and have a long talk; there's a thing I want your advice upon."

"Come and welcome," was the cheerful reply; "but surely your father's son can't be in want of legal advice? What's the matter, Master Hugh? Now I come to look at you, you seem rather down in the mouth. Have you robbed a church, outrun the constable, or been jilted by some fair lady?"

Trefusis shook his head.

"None of those things, sir; but I admit I feel in the blues. I've just heard of the death of a friend."

"My dear fellow," cried Adam West, heartily, "forgive my jesting. Your grave face and your saying you wanted my advice set me thinking you might be in some entanglement. Come along, this is a very leisurely day at the office, Williams is away, and no clients seem coming."

"I ought to tell you first," said Hugh simply, "that I shall have to cast a serious doubt on one of your clients."

Adam West faced round suddenly, with the question,—

"Do you mean Guy Bertram?"

"How could you guess it?"

"Simply, some days ago I received a visit from Mrs. Smith."

"Oh!"

"She told me you had promised to see us on the subject, but you were bound fast by military duties, and could not get away, and from a letter of Mr. Bertram's she fancied he was paying his addresses to Miss Elsinore, and so she thought no time should be lost."

"That fear is over now," said Hugh hotly, "Hildred Elsinore is dead. I only hope the fact of Guy Bertram's courtship did not trouble her last days. I have just been round to her uncle's—Warrington, the barrister, you know. I thought he would be the best person to see you about this, but I found he had only just got the news of his niece's death and gone home."

Mr. West looked thoughtful.

"What did she die of?"

"I have no idea. I only heard the bare fact. I should have gone to call in Daffodil-road. I know the Warringtons very well

only it seemed too soon to intrude upon their grief."

"I can give you a few particulars," said Mr. West, grimly. "Christmas eve was to have been Miss Elsinore's wedding-day. When the morning came she was missing, and the family found a note declaring she preferred death to marrying Guy Bertram. Her cloak and hat were found upon the bridge, and the Rector of Little Netherton will now have the pleasant reflection he drove his child to seek a last home in the peaceful waters of the river Eek."

But Mr. West was not prepared for the effect of his news on Hugh Trefusis. The young man grew deathly pale, and staggered as though about to fall, only a strong hand was laid on his shoulder.

"I had no idea you would feel it like this. I never dreamed you were friends!"

"I had only seen her once; but she was my ideal. When I heard of her death this morning I knew that I had loved her unknown even to myself!"

Adam West looked preternaturally solemn. "Can you keep a secret young man?"

"I think so!"

"This is a very important one," said the lawyer dully; "and I don't tell it you unless you give me your solemn word not to mention it to anyone, specially the Warringtons!"

Trefusis felt puzzled.

"I give you my word," he said gravely. "Indeed, I am not likely to see the Warringtons. As your suspicions of Guy Bertram are already aroused, there is no further object for my disturbing them in their sorrow."

"All right; don't forget your promise. Now for the secret. Hildred Elsinore is alive and well. At present she is staying with us at Beckenham, as my aunt's guest."

Trefusis started.

"Impossible!"

"Come and see," proposed the lawyer, cordially; "there's nothing doing at the office, and I was on my way home when I met you. If you will honour me with your company I can promise you a hearty welcome from my aunt, and a sight of Hildred."

"But—"

"The explanation is simple enough. Mrs. Smith, who is as sharp as a needle, saw at once that if Guy Bertram was an impostor he would move Heaven and earth to marry the real heiress of Tempest Mere. Between us we concocted a letter to Miss Elsinore, mentioning no names, but telling her the man then begging for her favour was an impostor, and if she would only hold out bravely we would soon prove him so to all the world. The poor child wrote back her wedding was fixed for Christmas eve, and unless we could give her proofs that Mr. Bertram was an impostor, she dared not break her promise to marry him. Of course there was but one thing to do. It was impossible to find proofs of his villainy in less than a week. Clearly the girl was not strong enough to stand against her parents' persuasions. We could only suggest flight."

"But her friends believe her dead?"

"Well, if they hadn't they'd have looked for her, and made themselves decidedly unpleasant. I know if Guy Bertram was an impostor his end would be almost as well gained by Hildred's death; and, to tell you the truth, I thought her parents deserved a fright for the willingness they had showed to sell the girl to a rich husband."

"And she is really alive?"

"Alive and well! Poor little thing, she walked to Chilton, where she was very little known, and came to London by the first train on Thursday—a horrid slow Parliamentary, which stopped everywhere. From York she telegraphed to us, and I was waiting at King's Cross. I don't profess to be a sentimental man; but when I saw that girl's poor little white face, and thought how she had been treated by her own flesh and blood my heart ached for her; and as for my poor aunt, whom I need to think the meekest and gentle-

est of old ladies, I believe she would be ready to scratch Mrs. Elsinore's eyes out if she got a sight of her."

"And how long do you propose to keep up the fiction of Miss Hildred's death?"

"Until we have settled the question of Guy Bertram's identity. In a very few days we hope to be able to tell the truth to Mr. and Mrs. Warrington; but we dare not reveal the secret until we are sure they have ceased corresponding with Mr. and Mrs. Elsinore. When such letters as would naturally be exchanged after a death are over I shall go down to Daffodil-road myself."

"Have you heard anything of Mr. Bertram?"

"Enough to prove he was deceiving the Elsinores pretty thoroughly. He told them he meant to sail for Australia directly after the wedding. In fact, he said he had taken his passage in the *Ocean Queen*, which sailed on Christmas-day. I went down to the shipping office, but his name was not in the list of passengers; and oddly enough, I heard from one of our clerks to-day that he was in London staying at the Langham Hotel."

"Alone?" asked Trefusis; "but, of course, he would be alone. The most marked thing about him was that he had no intimate friends."

"Well," said the lawyer, dully, "we manage his affairs, and so I can find out plenty of his doings. It seems he has drawn all the money standing to his credit in his London bank. A man doesn't suddenly call in several thousand pounds without some strong motive. Perhaps he feared detection, and thought he would provide himself against all risks."

"Does Miss Elsinore know your suspicions?"

"Not entirely. She fancies I believe her grandmother made a later will revoking her legacy to Mr. Bertram. It's no use to tell her more. The child has almost a morbid horror of him already. Innocent as she is she is woman enough to be confident of one thing, she told my aunt in spite of Mr. Bertram's protestations she felt from the first he did not love her."

Kingleigh was one of those suburban residences for which Beckenham is remarkable. A long wide road, stretching well-nigh from Beckenham to Shortlands, on which were built, at irregular intervals, detached houses of every size and every shape. No two of them exactly alike, each approached by a carriage drive, and each commanding a rental of not less than a hundred a-year. A thoroughly modern road inhabited by successful people; but the houses were cheerful and in good taste, and as Captain Trefusis walked up the drive of Kingleigh at his host's side, he could well believe that the bright red brick homestead had seemed like a city of refuge to Hildred in her hour of need.

Old Mrs. Truscott must have been a woman of resources. Hildred had arrived in a very shabby blue serge. From the night of her coming till to-day, the shops had been hermetically closed, and yet the kindly widow had contrived to supply her young visitor—who, of course, had brought not a vestige of luggage—with all things necessary in the way of toilet, and a few that were ornamental, as the pretty rose-coloured tea-gown which the girl was wearing when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room.

"Hildred," said Mr. West, "I have brought a friend of yours home; and as he seemed very much concerned by the news of your death, after making him promise secrecy, I brought him here."

The girl looked at Trefusis for a moment with her beautiful eyes, then they drooped beneath his earnest gaze, and she said, gravely,—

"You must not think more hardly of me than you can help. Indeed, I did not mean to be deceitful."

"I could never think hardly of you," he cried, eagerly, "but I fear you have had troubles since we parted."

"Have you seen Aunt Bessie lately? Oh, Captain Trefusis you can't think how happy I was at that dear little house in Daffodil-road."

"Yes, I can, for I know how kind your aunt is. I have not seen her for months, as I have been tied to my regiment at Blank-hampton."

The next moment he regretted the word, for Hildred grew pale as death. Of course, she knew that Blankhampton was the nearest town to Tempest Mere.

After dinner the lawyer retired to his study to write letters, and Hugh, going to the drawing-room discovered that old Mrs. Truscott had fallen asleep over her book, and Hildred was practically alone. Drawing a chair near her, Hugh sat down, and in a very few words he made it clear to her that he for one should never blame her for her flight from home.

"I cannot tell you the distrust I have had lately of Mr. Bertram. At first he fascinated me strangely; but away from him my eyes were opened, and it was a real anxiety to me when I heard he had gone to Netherton."

Hildred sighed.

"Papa and my step-mother will never forgive me," she said, sadly. "You see Mr. Bertram is rich, and they think so much of money. If only they had let me stay in London with dear Aunt Bessie!"

"Mr. Bertram will not vent his disappointment on your family," said Hugh warmly. "If my suspicions are correct, he has the strongest reason for wishing to keep on good terms with your father."

"I dread to think of the future," said the poor child, wearily. "You see, even if he is found out and everyone knows he is not as rich as he seemed to be, I can never go home."

"Why not?"

"There would be the scandal," faltered Hildred. "Everyone believes me dead. Oh, Captain Trefusis, you can't think what it feels like to know one may live for years and years, and yet for there to be always a shadow over one's past. Mr. West is very kind to me; and Mrs. Truscott as good to me, as though I were her own grandchild, but—I can't forget. It seems to me as though I were a kind of fraud, a creature who must always be in hiding and never dare to bear her own name."

"Hush!" cried Captain Trefusis, "you must not talk like this. It is nothing, you have done no harm. There was no one to save you from a marriage you hated, and so your only remedy was flight. It is better to be free—even if a few people thought harshly of the way you gained that freedom."

She looked up at him falteringly.

"Do you mean it really, or do you only say it to comfort me?"

"I mean it. I honour you, Miss Elsinore, with all my heart."

There was a long, long silence. He looked up and saw the tears gathering in her eyes. Then he put out his hand and clasped hers in a fond, close pressure.

"Hildred," he said, tenderly, "we have met but once before, and under any other circumstances I would wait before I told you what I am going to say. Dear, the memory of that June evening when I saw you first has never left me. You were, you are, my ideal. I know that always; but it was only to-day, when they told me suddenly of your death, that I realized something else. You are my one love. If you could learn to care for me, I would defend you from every trouble. If in the days to come you will trust yourself to me, you shall be loved and cherished till your life's end!"

It was rather an inopportune moment for Mrs. Truscott to awake and assure them, as is the fashion of old ladies who have enjoyed a nap, that she had only been "resting her eyes"; but Hugh Trefusis did not despair.

He knew that if Hildred had really disliked him she would not have let her hand linger in his so confidently.

When he took his leave he carried with



him a faint hope that the one girl he had ever longed for might be his wife.

He called on Mr. West at the office the first thing the next day.

"I want to tell you," he said, frankly, "that I wish to marry Miss Elsinore."

Adam West stared at him.

"I thought you had only seen her once—before last night."

"There is such a thing as love at first sight," retorted Captain Trefusis; "but I will admit I should not have spoken to her so soon, only I feel she will go fretting over the estrangement with her family, till perhaps she goes home and submits to their tyranny again."

"There is no estrangement—they believe her dead. Am I to understand you have spoken to Miss Elsinore?"

"Yes—"

"And what did she say?"

"Nothing—we were interrupted. Mr. West, I have a moderate amount of private income now, for my mother's fortune all came to me. Some day or other I shall probably be Lord Netherston's heir. You see, I shall have enough to keep a wife."

"Yes—and if Guy Bertram is the impostor we believe, Hildred Elsinore may bring her husband a million of money."

Hugh Trefusis flushed hotly.

"Hang it all!" he said, dolefully, "I'd forgotten that chance. I dare say you take me for the meanest fortune-hunter on the face of the earth?"

"My dear lad," said the older man, kindly, "we are not strangers. I don't believe you capable of mercenary motives, and I think it would be the best thing in the world for that poor little girl to marry you, but—"

"I'm not rich enough—"

"Hush! You are a good match even for an heiress; but do look on the other side. The Guy Bertram we know may be an impostor; I think he is, but that does not prove Hildred's claims. The real Guy Bertram may be alive; in that case, what will your father say to your wedding the eldest of a poor clergyman's nine daughters?"

"He won't like it," said Hugh Trefusis, frankly, "but he'll come round. After all, I shall need to ask him for any money. He's thrown out hints once or twice he prefers birth to fortune in a daughter-in-law, and Hildred has that."

"The Elsinores are of good stock," admitted Adam West. "If you introduce Hildred to your father as Mrs. Warrington's niece and Lady Tempest's grandchild, he may be amenable, but, for goodness sake, don't mention the Rector of Little Netherston and his large family."

"It hasn't come to mentioning at all yet," said Trefusis, ruefully. "I've got to go back to Blankhampton on Saturday. Mr. West, and goodness knows when I shall get any more leave."

"Well, I can only offer you a general welcome whenever you can come to Kingsleigh. I haven't much sympathy with love affairs generally, but I own I should like to see that child with a husband to take care of her."

Captain Trefusis put a most liberal construction on the lawyer's invitation. "He went down to Beekham every day, and on the last visit of all, Friday, he was left alone with Hildred; and he asked her very tenderly whether she had thought over his wishes, and felt able to give him any answer."

"I only want to know that I may hope," he whispered, "my darling. I won't hurry you. All I want is to leave you here my promised wife, and to have the right to stand by you if trouble comes."

"It would be so bad for you," she said, simply. "Don't you see, Captain Trefusis, a shadow must always hang over my past?"

But Hugh was not going to be put off with that excuse.

"My darling, I would gladly bear any shadow for you, but, indeed, there will be none. As my wife, no one will dare to speak a

word against you; as for your brief engagement to Guy Bertram, no one beyond the people in your own neighbourhood knew of it, and I will never ask you to go back to that county until all the world knows how base and worthless was the man from whom you fled. I may be kept some time at Blankhampton without leave of absence, but we can trust each other, dear, and I shall carry a light heart with me into exile, if only you will give me your promise."

And there, by the firelight in the pretty drawing-room at Kingsleigh, Hildred Elsinore pledged her troth for the second time; but how differently was her answer given now! Looking into Hugh's face with a strange, sweet love-light in her eyes, she confessed she had cared for him always ever since that June evening when she saw him first in Daffodil-road, and one reason why she so shrank from accepting Guy Bertram was that she could not forget Captain Trefusis.

"And you will be mine, darling, very soon. You won't mind beginning life quietly, Dreda, so that we are together?"

"I shall mind nothing in the world, Hugh, so that I have you."

With this very consoling promise, Captain Trefusis went home, to be met by his father with the indignant greeting,—

"Really, Hugh, you are too provoking. If you choose to spend every day of your leave in long, solitary excursions, you might at least condescend to leave word where you're to be found. I've been sending after you to every place I could think of ever since lunch."

"I'm sorry, sir. Is anything the matter at Blankhampton?"

"Bother Blankhampton!" growled Mr. Trefusis, who was very angry. "You'd better see about writing for leave of absence. Just read this telegram, and try if you can't catch the boat train from Victoria; it's only seven now, so you may do it."

The telegram was very short. The sender was James Devenish, St. Madeleine, Beauville, France; and it was addressed to Hugh's father, probably because Jim was uncertain of the Captain's whereabouts.

"Lord Netherston dying. His one wish is to see your son; no time to lose."

Such was Mr. Trefusis's zeal, that he packed his son off to Victoria in time for the tidal train; and as he stepped on to the platform at Dover, Hugh received the answer to his telegram to his Onief at Blankhampton, warmly agreeing to his request for leave.

"The poor old man can't deprive you of your inheritance," Mr. Trefusis said shortly to Hugh, "and to my mind that's a reason why you shouldn't disregard his wish."

As he travelled slowly through France towards the south, Hugh thought over his father's words. The Earl of Netherston had never expressed a wish to see him before. It seemed strange he should desire a meeting on his death-bed; but Hugh was not the sort of fellow to cross the dying; besides, ever since he had heard Hildred's account of her meeting with Lord Netherston, he had felt a great interest in his unknown cousin, so he pushed onwards as fast as time and the dilatory French trains could take him, resolving it should not be his fault if he arrived too late; though they assured him in Paris that owing to the remoteness of St. Madeleine, and the peculiarities of the Sunday trains, he would very likely not arrive there till Monday at daybreak.

## CHAPTER XXII.

HOWEVER much a fear has troubled us, to have it put into words and stated as a fact by another person comes as a kind of shock. It was so with Mrs. Robson. Often and often since she came to St. Madeleine, had she felt doubts of her son-in-law. Often a strange feeling had come to her that there was a mystery in his life she could not fathom; and yet on this Christmas Eve when she told her anxieties to

Mr. Devenish, it came as a sudden blow upon her when he said,—

"If he is the same Claude Maitland as I knew in Australia—and I fear he is—Heaven help your daughter, for he was one of the most unmitigated scoundrels I ever met."

For some minutes the poor woman could not speak. Then she gained courage and looked pitifully into her friend's face. Jim Devenish really seemed a friend to her, for they had been thrown together in Lord Netherston's sick-room, and noting his frank, truthful nature, his kind, unselfish ways, she felt she could trust him entirely.

"Please tell me," she said anxiously.

"My dear lady, don't look so troubled. I may be mistaken; but your description of Claude Maitland fits exactly with my remembrance of a false friend who well-nigh wrecked my life."

"Ten years ago, smarting from a great trouble, I went to Australia. I was not rich enough to please the woman whose only child I wished to marry. She taunted me with being mercenary, and at last I was stung into taking a mad oath—I can see its folly now—that I would never see or write to my Blanche without her mother's consent, that I would never set foot in England while Lady Tempest lived except at her request."

Mrs. Robson looked her sympathy.

"And the young lady died?"

"Before three years were up; and I have kept faithful to her memory ever since. Well, I met Maitland on the way out. He had a fascinating manner, a handsome face, and we became great friends. For three years or more I was constantly with him. In that time I was warned again and again by mutual acquaintances of his character. He was penniless and lived on my supplies. He forged my name and jeered at me behind my back. These were not all the tales I heard, but I despised them. It was even hinted to me that more than one honest home traced a daughter's ruin to my friend; but I was blind, I would believe nothing—till the awakening came. We were wandering up country, and had lost the 'track.' I was attacked by a wasting fever, and seemed likely to die. Maitland suggested he should start on a foraging expedition, and try and find some stockman's hut. I agreed. He was to return in a few hours. I was so ill he might well believe I should be dead by night-fall."

Mrs. Robson listened with breathless interest.

"Don't tell me he never came back. He couldn't have forsaken his friend like that."

"For a day and night I lingered without bite or sup, then two bushmen riding by caught sight of me and came to my assistance. It seemed a forlorn hope that I could last till they reached home; but they made the attempt. While one helped me on to his horse, the other collected my few possessions. It was then I knew the extent of my friend's treachery. He had never meant to return. He had taken a leather case containing, besides my Blanche's letters and her picture, my sole available ready money. He had left me penniless to die of starvation, while with my gold he paid his passage to England."

"And that man is Nan's husband?"

"We don't know that he is," said Devenish, thoughtfully. "We must hope not."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Never. I stayed with the bushmen for years. When the younger died, I took his place and kept the old farmer company till his death. He left me all he had, and his boy's name, then I came back to Europe; but England was barred to me by my rash vow. I have lived abroad ever since, and though Lady Tempest's death this spring removed the barrier between me and my native land, I had grown too much attached to Lord Netherston to leave him."

Mrs. Robson set her teeth together.

"I'd have got back those letters somehow."

"I doubt his having kept them. Most likely after taking out the money he flung the letters



["YOU WON'T MIND BEGINNING LIFE QUIETLY, DREDA, SO THAT WE ARE TOGETHER?" SAID HUGH.]

and portrait into the first stream he came to. Besides, I could not bear the thought of meeting him. No reproaches of mine would have punished him enough. There are some wrongs one can only leave to Heaven's punishment, you know—

*The mills of Heaven grind slowly,  
But they grind exceeding sure."*

It was a strange companionship—the sad, intellectual refined traveller; the practical, commonplace woman of the people. But Mrs. Robson and Jim Davenish had both a singular love of truth and a great kindness of heart. They understood each other perfectly without many words.

"It'll be a sad Christmas for both of us, sir," the widow said, as they parted. "You can't but feel you're near losing your friend, and I—well, it makes my heart ache to look at Nan, and think of what may be in store."

Lord Netherton rallied, and it was only more than a week later that Jim Davenish, at his earnest request, telegraphed for his heir.

"He won't have my name," said the dying Earl; "but he will rule in the place my wife made such a happy home. I never cared to meet him when I was well; but I shall see his mother may be soon, and I'd like to be able to tell her something of her boy."

So the telegram went, and from the bottom of his unselfish heart Jim hoped Captain Trefusis might arrive in time.

There were no last desires to make, no last wishes to record; Lord Netherton had made his will just after his last visit to England, and he was quite satisfied with its contents.

"I've left you most of my savings, Jim," he told his friend, simply. "You may not care for the money yourself, but I know you'll make a good use of it. And I've left a provision for little Hildred Elsinore, and made you her guardian, for I doubt me her father's too much under his wife's rule to be fair to his

first-born; and, of course, I've made Andrew comfortable, and I think that's all."

"I shall value the legacy as a proof of your affection," said Jim; "but you know, Lord Netherton, I never looked for anything."

"Aye! you'll be going home when you've done with me, Jim, and you must have an eye to that little girl; may be if I had lived in England myself I could have made things easier for her—and she has my daughter's name."

Jim promised.

Mrs. Robson, who shared his vigil by the dying Earl had her eyes full of tears. Not so much for the good old man who was so soon to start on his last journey, as for the sea of perplexities which surrounded her own lot.

Claude Maitland had arrived only that morning in the heat of spirits, as devoted to Nan as ever, and it was an anxious task for the poor woman to decide whether he was the hero of Mr. Davenish's sad story.

Jim had promised her to settle that question by calling at the maisonette and asking to be introduced to her son-in-law, but she could not remind him of that promise now when his every thought was engrossed with his dying friend. So she had left Nan and her husband and stolen down again to see if she could be of any use, for the end was very near, and the doctor had said that Sabbath would be Lord Netherton's last on earth.

It was quite late in the evening when the faithful servant opened the door of the sick room noiselessly, and announced, "Captain Trefusis."

Jim and Mrs. Robson saw a pale handsome face, a pair of honest dark eyes, while the air of weariness and marks of travel showed the young man had lost no time in obeying the summons. Both drew back and suffered Hugh to approach the bed alone. They liked the simple earnest way in which he spoke to the dying man.

"I started at once, my lord. Believe me, I would have come sooner had I guessed you

would like it. I often heard of you when I was a little chap. My mother loved to talk to us of Netherton."

"Ah," and the fast glazing eyes rested kindly on the young soldier. "she was a good woman."

"Indeed she was."

"And I shall see her soon. Can I tell her you will make a worthy master of the old place she loved so well?"

"I will do my best," breathed Hugh. "I have never counted on your inheritance, sir. My father brought me up to work hard at my profession, and I am very fond of it."

"You look like a soldier, but you'll have to give that up now and settle at the Castle; it would be too hard on the old place to have another absent master; and, Hugh, when you choose your wife, see she's a good true woman like your mother."

"My wife is chosen," said the young officer, frankly. "Lord Netherton, I have not told even my father yet, but I think you would like to know. I am going to marry Hildred Elsinore, your daughter's namesake."

"Little Hildred! How did you meet her?"

"I met her in London last June. I don't think her people at Netherton are very good to her, but she has a very kind uncle and aunt in London, and I hope to win their consent."

"I saw her once. She has a sweet face, like her mother's, and she won't come to you empty handed either, Hugh. I have taken care of that."

The young soldier's voice was husky.

"Let me take her your blessing, my lord, and tell her you thought of her kindly to the last. She has had so little love and affection in her life, my poor little girl."

"She will have both now," breathed the Earl. "May heaven bless her, Jim, it is getting dark; give me your hand." And with that faithful hand in his, Lord Netherton's spirit passed away.

(To be continued.)





["YOU ARE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CREATURE IN THE WORLD, HESTER!" SAID LEONOREL.]

## TWO WOMEN.

### CHAPTER XV.

If Lady Thurso had needed anything whereby to spur on her incipient jealousy of her step-sister into action, that something would most certainly have been found forthcoming in the events recorded to her by her husband on his return from that visit to Helmetstone school and to Hester.

Violet was, in fact, so incensed by the news he had to give her that she was absolutely speechless at first.

That Hester should have been the recipient of this letter from Lady Alice Carne—that Hester should have won such a tribute of love and tender thought from the dead George Campbell—that Hester should have come so absolutely before her! Why, Thurso's people had positively not vouchsafed the very smallest recognition of his wife! There had been a lot of talk about Lady Alice, and how sweet she was, and how true and loyal a friend she would and could be to Violet, but there had never come any sign or proof of this friendship; there had, in fact, been complete silence on Lady Alice's part since the day she had sent her modest little wedding gift to Thurso's bride—a small golden pendent, set with a single diamond, which had provoked Violet's contempt and disappointment, even though one kind line had been written with this gift saying it was sent to "Violet from her sister Alice."

The silence that followed was, perhaps, as much due to Violet as to Lady Alice, for with a singular lack of courtesy and certainly of tact, Lady Thurso neglected to acknowledge her sister-in-law's gift, which was in truth of so little value in her eyes that she had tossed it carelessly into one of her many jewel boxes, and left it forgotten and unworn as she left it unacknowledged.

Once, in fact, become Thurso's wife, Violet did not intend to let the antagonism of her husband's family weigh very much on her mind. Of course it would have been more gratifying in one sense to have let the world see that the marriage was approved of and liked by the Dowager Lady Thurso and all the rest; but to the balance of this good there was always the corresponding consideration that these "dowdy prigish creatures," as Violet called them, might, and no doubt would, have made her life exceedingly difficult, and have probably spoiled any chance of enjoyment, and the fulfilment of those ambitious social schemes which filled the young woman's brain.

She knew Thurso had had a letter from his mother. He carefully concealed the fact from his wife, being too tender in his thoughts to let her know the bitterness contained in it; but Violet waited her opportunity, and, by resorting to underhand and dishonourable means, managed to get hold of the letter and make herself mistress of its contents.

It may be supposed there was not much feeling of respect or desire for affectionate intercourse in Violet's heart towards Lady Thurso after this. It had, of course, only been selfishness and worldly wisdom that had made her hope for an alliance with her mother-in-law; but that had been before her marriage, when all had been vague and uncertain; now nothing could undo what was done, she was Violet Countess of Thurso. She was young, she was exceedingly beautiful, she should succeed without anything more to help her. The world was always kind and tender to such as she; and, after all, it was her mother who had been the real culprit, not she. Her past, at least so far as the world knew, was a stainless record of sweet girlishness, rendered the more gentle and pathetic because of the shadow a mother's hand had cast upon it. As Thurso's wife, Violet told herself, she would soon sail into the sparkling waters of

society, and she would find life doubly joyous and satisfactory without the embarrassing strictures of a puritanical mother-in-law, and a lot of dowdy husband's relations to curb her and restrain her in her enjoyment. The question of her own mother was speedily settled by Violet.

Lord Thurso had said to Hester, as we know, that Mrs. Campbell had insisted on going away, although he had pressed her to stay, and he had not quite understood the haste with which his wife's mother took her departure from Sedgebrook. His laughing, dancing, fairy-like wife could have enlightened him, for she was the motive power that urged her mother to such haste.

There had been a short scene between Mrs. Menro Campbell and her daughter, but it had been long enough to live in the older woman's memory all the rest of her life.

Perhaps for the first time in her cold, calculating, selfish, shameless career, Helen Campbell tasted real anguish of heart. She had loved Violet better than she had even loved herself; greater proof of love was impossible to such a woman as she than to put any living creature before herself. The blow fell all the more heavily because it had been so utterly unexpected.

At last, it had seemed to this eager, worldly woman, success had come to her in its entirety. Now she could draw her breath, and rest at peace basking in the sunshine of her child's splendid position.

That Violet could ever entertain aught but the tenderest, most girlish love and admiration for her beautiful mother was a possibility which had even not shadowed itself in that mother's mind.

As we have seen, Violet had managed to deceive her mother perhaps more successfully than she had deceived any other person. It was, therefore, a terrible moment to Helen Campbell, that one in which her child, her baby, the one thing precious to her and in

whose eyes she had desired to seem always that which, alas! she certainly was not, chose to draw aside a little of the veil that had existed between them so long, and speak out coldly and quietly a little of that truth which had never until now seemed so hideous in the wretched woman's sight.

No need to chronicle exactly what passed between mother and child, enough to say that Violet was absolutely successful in carrying out her desire. Chagrined, too deeply hurt to be angry, fearful, and amazed, Helen Campbell announced her intention of leaving Sedgemoor without delay.

Violet had kissed her as she said this, in her old caressing fashion.

"You are always a dear, sweet mamma," she said, just as though she had been begging for a bon-bon or some trivial favour, instead of having planted a very dagger of bitter pain into her mother's heart, "and you always see what is right and wise. You are so much cleverer than poor little me, and you understand things so well; besides, you are so fond of me, and you want me to get on, I know, and so—"

And then the mother had silenced her.

"That will do, Violet. Say no more. You are right, I understand, though understanding has come so late."

And after that there had been no more said. "She will go," Violet said to herself, shrugging her shoulders, "that is very certain!"

And so Mrs. Campbell did, despite all Thuro's kind and hospitable protests.

"Young people are best alone," she had answered him with a faint smile, and then with a bitterness and a pathos that touched Thuro's ready heart, "most particularly is Violet better—without me!"

He accepted this in silence, he had nothing to urge, for he knew in a worldly sense she was right, but he had liked her from the beginning; and even if this had not been so, she was his little love's mother, and as such entitled to a full share in his regard and liking. He was very sorry that she should go, but after this he said no more. Violet saw her mother away with a smile to the last.

"Yes, we understand one another now," she said to herself. There was a subtle change in Mrs. Campbell's manner to her child, a shrinking from her, a horrible pain in her heart as she recognized the living lie she had brought into the world, and realized, too, that the evil she had done herself would be as nothing compared to the capabilities for evil contained in Violet's lovely little person.

It was a strangely sombre-silent woman who drove away from Sedgemoor that day. Thuro had been the last to say farewell, and she carried the impression of his warm, honest sweet nature with her as the only spark of comfort in the desolate misery Violet's hand had dealt out to her. If an enemy had ever desired a punishment or a revenge on Helen Campbell, of a surety that enemy's wish was realized now.

The punishment that had come was the greatest, the most terrible mental suffering a human heart—and such a heart as hers—could support. Violet had heaved a sigh of relief as the carriage bearing her mother had rolled away.

"I thought there would have been more trouble!" she said to herself meditatively, callously; and then she had given a cry of joy, for a box stood on her toilette table—a box familiar to her from her childhood. She knew at a single glance its purport and its contents.

Before going out into the shadowed land her own misdeeds had apporportioned for her, Helen Campbell had given another and farewell evidence of the love that—as far as Violet had been concerned—had always been true, generous, unselfish. She could have found no way that would have touched her child so much as the legacy of her most valuable jewels now did.

Violet scattered the glittering gems out on the table and revelled in them. A piece of

paper had lain just inside the box, in pencil written upon it were these few words: "Wear these sometimes, and when you do, remember your mother, who, with all her faults, has loved you well!"

Violet crumpled the piece of paper in her hand and flung it in the fire, then she gave herself up to worship of herself in the lovely diamonds, and other jewels that she had desired and envied all these years. She had her own share of jewels now, but she had always coveted her mother's; and in the joy of possessing them she even forgot her cause for annoyance and jealousy. Till her pleasure was spent and thought of Hester returned to revive everything.

She had after much pondering determined to send her husband to hold out the olive branch to Hester. She had a shrewd sort of suspicion that Hester would incline to like Thuro not only for his own sake, but because of this connection with George Campbell. And she felt, too, that whatever objection the girl might have to acceding to their wishes, she would find it much more difficult to express them to Thuro than to her. In fact, Violet knew for a certainty that Hester would not have listened to her for one moment had she gone alone. So she sent Thuro in her stead.

"There is just the sort of man Hester will fall in love with," Violet said to herself after she was gone. She had curled herself up in a cosy chair, and gave way to her thoughts, which though they were not all pleasant or satisfactory, had still many a snail's pace of future success and enjoyment to gladden her. She laughed to herself as she said these words.

"Heaven!" she exclaimed, this time not lazily, "but if this were to come about, how I could make her suffer!" and the idea was so amusing and so entrancing to Violet that she laughed aloud, and then getting bored with herself she fell asleep, and only woke just before her husband returned from his long walk. "You have been successful," she cried at once on seeing him, "but, of course, I knew you would be."

Thuro took her in his arms and kissed her, the cool, fragrant touch of the night air clung about him; Violet did not notice this, although she was looking at him curiously.

"Tell me all about it. Did you succeed, Thuro? You look so solemn—just as though you had been to church!" and to herself she added, "Hester is just as dull as any church service!"

Thuro sat down beside her and told her all, winding up with the episode of the letter from his sister, and the message his dead uncle had sent to Lady Alice, bequeathing Hester to his niece's love and care.

"So you see, my darling, you had even a stronger feeling of right in this matter than your own sweet goodness of heart. Hester Trefusis must indeed be our friend now."

Violet was so astounded, so furiously angry, she could not speak at first; when she did so, her voice was low and hard and not at all like her usual one.

"And—am I mentioned by any chance in this letter from your sister?"

Thuro coloured quietly; not till this moment did he remember to have noticed that Allie had made no mention of his wife whatsoever.

"Allie must have written in a great hurry, my darling love," he answered her swiftly, at the same time feeling sharp regret and sorrow that he could make her no different answer. It was certainly remiss of his sister; but, as he had just said, the letter must have been written off in the greatest hurry immediately Lady Alice had received that long delayed communication from her uncle. The girl's mind had evidently held no thought but one of sad emotion called up by perusal of his last wish to her, and her eagerness to comply with it. All this Lord Thuro said to his wife to explain away and soften the pain caused by being forgotten.

Violet heard him in silence. She sat apart from him, a mulish look had come over her fair face, her lips were drawn tight and thin, and her hands held one another closely. It was not merely the fact of Lady Alice's unconscious slight to her, it was the bitter, maddening reflection that whichever way she turned now Hester seemed to get ahead of her. A little jealousy and natural resentment may be forgiven Violet in this evidence of friendship given so freely to her step-sister when she herself had been set coldly on one side by her husband's people, and this, of course, was the reason Thuro immediately found for her changed looks; but the hot, passionate hate, the almost senseless rage against one who was so innocently, so unconsciously, the cause of disturbances to her, was unpardonable and rather terrible.

Thuro tried to comfort her; he put his arms about her and drew her to him, while he settled swiftly in his mind that he would write off first thing the following morning to Allie and reproach her for her lack of thought. A single message of kind intent would have spared his little love all this natural hurt and unhappiness.

"You are glad, are you not, my precious, that Hester is going to do as you wish?" he said, tenderly.

Violet repulsed this caressing arms, and gave a short laugh as she drew away from him.

"I am afraid I cannot flatter myself that Hester is doing anything to please me."

Thuro hastened to tell her that Hester had agreed to her wish before she had even known of his sister's letter.

Violet moved about aimlessly in her anger. She would have loved at this moment to have unheated her tongue and let loose some of the passionate dislike and impatient jealousy that was consuming her, but with all her anger she did not lose her shrewd calculating common sense, and she saw that to say anything would be folly.

If she had not needed Hester for her own plans, it would have been a different matter; but putting Charles Maxwell on one side, altogether she felt an eager determination grow greater and greater within her as each turn of the wheel seemed to show Hester to her in a new and more dangerous light, to work things so that she would not only have Hester under her sharp, cunning eye all the time, but within touch of her cruel, merciless hand, to be smitten and punished when the hour was ripe.

Thuro was greatly distressed about her. He went up to her again, and was full of tenderness.

"You must forgive Allie this time, darling," he said; "it was only because of her haste. You see, she says how vexed she is not to have written sooner—it is ever so long ago. Why, I sent away that letter immediately, and Hester gave it to me the first day I came down here, when I met you, my sweet."

Violet could not repress one touch of spite.

"How sly and mean of Hester. Fancy, not to have said a word to us, and to have had that letter all that time; and she pretends to be so disinterested too."

Thuro was jarred, as he could not help being. Apart from the pettiness of the speech, it was impossible, almost incongruous to assimilate the words "sly and mean" with that proud, noble, girlish face and form he had just left.

He gave an unconscious sigh, and Violet, hearing it, changed her tack and not being desirous of exhibiting herself in her true colours to him—at least not yet awhile—and, moreover, finding a solace and satisfaction in his tender care, made further demands on it by breaking into tears.

"I do think Allie might have remembered me, poor little me," she cried through her tears, submitting to be kissed and soothed like a child. "It was nasty of her, now wasn't it, Thuro? She would not have liked it. Poor Hester she has had such few friends; but



now she will be quite rich, with—*with Alice—and us—only*," and here Violet rested her wet cheek against her husband's, "only you will promise not to care for her more than me, won't you, Thuro?"

"Oh, my baby! my baby!" the young man answered, laughingly yet earnestly, and then he devoted himself so assiduously to the task of comfort that in a very little while smiles had chased away all tears, and he told himself, happily, that the cloud was passed, little knowing, in his ignorance, and blind faith and love, that it was a cloud that would remain fixed on the horizon of his dual life with Violet, and gather to it day after day more clouds, and still more, till the sky would be dark and overcast, without hope of light or a ray of joy to shoot sun-like across it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

HESTER never forgot that moment when Alice Carne's sweet, loving, heartfelt letter was put into her hands by the writer's brother.

She was touched beyond all description—touched at the remembrance of her dead friend's thought of her, of the readiness with which his niece had responded to his request, and touched by the sympathy and readiness also with which Thurso allied himself with his sister in this matter.

She scarcely closed her eyes in sleep that night. In the very midst of her anxiety and shadowed thoughts about Leonore and about life in many of its phases, had come a sudden, an unexpected gleam of joy.

Not since she had had her beloved father with her to give her unpeakable happiness had the girl felt so light-hearted and full of pleasure as she did this night.

The vague forebodings, the shrinking doubts that contact with Violet had brought all too quickly into being within her, had no place in this new, this unexpected happiness. She thought of Lady Alice as of the gentle girl whose name had been so often on George Campbell's lips, a possible sister rather than a friend, sympathetic, warm-hearted, good.

She thought of Thurso not as Violet's husband, but as the boy Dick, who had been so warmly loved by the weary, pain-worn, suffering man up to the last day of his life.

"And I understand it. Oh! yes, I can understand the charm, the power to draw out so much love!" Hester said to herself, as she lay awake in the darkness of her room and conjured up the memory of the young man's handsome face, as she had been wont to do before she had met him in the flesh. There was a sense of romance to her circling about him, he had the bearing, the voice, the heart of a true knight; worthy brother of such a sister, worthy nephew of such an uncle.

Hester's pure, innocent spirit was unconscious of harm in thus letting the image of Thurso rise before her; she thought of him as of something good, someone who had borne a message to her of sweetness and happiness, someone who had offered her his friendship, his brotherhood; and for all these reasons she took delight in recalling him, and in telling up his good qualities. It would be the same with his sister Alice when the two girls had met.

When would that time be? Hester wondered to herself, as she heard the wind stirring the trees in the garden outside with a sound like sighing music.

She hoped soon, very soon, Eatty in the morning she would write an answer to that letter; she would send back love for love, and friendship given for friendship, offered so freely, so generously; and after that she must have patience and wait.

Morning was beginning to creep over the grey, misty sky, when Hester lost her thoughts in sleep, and the sun was streaming in through her open window when she awoke.

It was only natural that after such hours of intense mental delight there should come

a reaction, and this morning Hester, though her delight and remembrance of what had happened was none the less sweet, had not that undiluted sense of pleasure, that release from trouble, that had come to her for a short spell. Thoughts of Violet returned, and despite all that now changed the aspect of affairs, she still shrank from the idea of meeting her step-sister frequently, and being drawn into her life. She tried to shake off her doubts resolutely.

"It is horrible of me that I cannot put these thoughts out of my head. How do I know I am not wronging Violet shamefully? The past is not the present, and the influence that surrounds her is so different to what it used to be. I wish," Hester said to herself, with sincere regret, "I wish I could be more generous to Violet. I wish, oh! how I wish these hateful thoughts and feelings against her would not come."

She heard of Mrs. Campbell's departure from Sedgebrooke with a feeling of relief. For herself she desired never again to meet her step-mother, and yet, with her wonderful sympathy that stretched itself out to all who suffered, whether friend or foe, Hester had a touch of pity for the woman who had done her many ill things, but who nevertheless had given her love boundlessly, absolutely, to her only child who now meted out to her so poor a return.

Without actual knowledge of facts and events Hester was yet certain that it was Violet who had dismissed her mother thus promptly from her new life, and she pitied Helen Campbell most sincerely, not for her broken dream of social ambition, but for the pain her daughter's delicate flower-like cruelty was dealing out to her now.

It was almost impossible for Hester to refuse to listen to the promptings of her mind on this difficult question of Violet. She sighed now and then a little wearily. Glad as she was for the pleasure that had come to her the night before, she could not set aside the forebodings that came so involuntarily, nor the sensation of repugnance which rose so strong within her to any sort of intimacy with Violet.

"I should be happier even if I never heard her name mentioned again," she said to herself. "Violet has always troubled me, and I have such a certain feeling that the old troubles will be as nothing to that which I shall have through her in the future. She has never liked me, she does not like me now. Why does she seek me? What does she want of me? How can I serve her? She has everything to help her to attain all she needs. What is her motive?" Hester put the matter from her wearily at last. "I will think no more about it," she said, as she wrote her letter to Alice Carne, and then sat waiting for the hour of Leonore's arrival. "The die is cast, I have given my promise, I cannot draw back now. I can only hope that my misgivings are wrongly founded, and that the great good fortune that has come to Violet may have been the means of working a change in her. If this should not be—if my fears should ever be realised, and I find that she is unaltered—if I find she is using me for some purpose of her own, I will draw back, I will go far away, so that I need have to make no false excuse to him, or seem to be ungrateful to him for all his kindness."

Leonore and Miss Graham arrived punctually at the hour, and great and manifold were the parcels and boxes they brought with them. The future Lady Maxwell would enter on her married life with every sort of rich stuff and costly jewel to assist her.

The marriage was close at hand; in three more days Charles Maxwell and Mr. Chetwynde would travel down to Helmetstone again, and early in the morning of the fourth day the ceremony would be performed in the old village church, where Leonore had worshipped Sunday after Sunday for years past.

The girl gave vent to intense delight at seeing Hester again.

"It seems like two years, not two days," she said; "and oh! Hester, there is nothing half so beautiful in all London as you. I don't know what I shall do without you, but you will come to me very soon, will you not?—in a fortnight, perhaps, when—when we get back from Paris."

"A fortnight! That is indeed soon, Leo," Hester answered, smilingly yet gently.

"It sounds an awful long time," the bride-elect said, with an unconscious sigh.

"Come, let us go and see all your beautiful frocks and hats," Hester said, trying to be as gay as she could.

Leonore insisted on putting nearly all her new possessions on to Hester's slender queenly figure.

"They look just as they ought to look now," she said, without a particle of envy at the difference between her friend and herself. She sat there big, ungainly, red-faced, yet with a very wealth of love shining out of her light grey eyes. She had no pleasure so keen as loving and admiring Hester.

"You are the most beautiful creature in the world!" she said, after a long pause and pursuit of her girl friend in a costly brougham, which the fashionable dressmaker who had received *carte blanche* from Mr. Chetwynde, had placed in Miss Leighton's trousseau with a positive sigh of artistic regret.

"She will spoil it!" had been the woman's thought. The task of making Miss Leighton look fairly presentable was almost beyond her powers.

If she could have seen her "creation" on the tall proudly-held figure of Hester Trefusis, the dressmaker would have gone into ecstasies of delight. Every fold, every graceful line was given its full value. Leonore, dull and stupid as she was called, was quite keen enough to see this, to appreciate it.

"It is you who should marry Charles and wear all these clothes, Hester," she said, and then a pang shot across her ugly face, and tears gathered suddenly in her eyes. "Oh! Hester, if I could only buy a little beauty, if I could only be different to what I am—think with all my money, rich as I am, I am the ugliest, nastiest—"

Hester silenced the words with a quick kiss, a quick embrace.

"You are my own dear Leo," she said, swiftly, "the dearest, truest, most beautiful nature in the world. Now, look up at once and promise me there shall be no tears."

Leonore smiled at her words.

"It is because I should like to be really beautiful for his sake, for his eyes. I am so afraid," and then Leonore said no more; but Hester's heart sank, for her own fears could easily fill in the blank sentence.

"Let us put all these grand things back in their boxes," was all she said, and they set to work to do this, and talked of other things meanwhile.

The three days passed away calmly and sadly. A letter had come from Lady Thurso with an invitation to Hester which she refused, making her friend's closely approaching marriage her excuse; and an answer had come by return from Alice Carne.

"We shall be in London in late October or early November," she wrote; "we must meet, Hester, as soon as it is possible for us to do so. Alas! it may not be so easy, for you know, of course, that my mother is much grieved and troubled about Dick's marriage. I am so sorry about it, Dick and I have always been so dear to one another. What hurts him hurts me, and I fear he is suffering much now because of our mother's attitude."

"I am doing all I can to make things better, but it is a slow and, I fear, a hopeless matter. I have not spoken to her yet of you, but I shall give her poor Uncle George's letter to read on the earliest opportunity. And then, Hester dear, I hope she too will hold out her hand to you, and then we can work together to make things better for Thurso."

"Poor little Violet! My heart aches for her. I want to love my brother's wife, and

to be a sister to her. I can quite understand how hurt and sad she must be, and it is hard on her, poor lovely child. She is very lovely, is she not, Hester dear? Thurso wrote to me she was an angel of loveliness. I am glad for his sake she is this; but I hope it is the loveliness of the heart as well as the body. Write me again Hester, quickly, and if you have a picture of yourself send it to me. I want to know what you are like, though I am sure your face is sweet and good and honest."

Hester let Leonore read this letter, having told her all that had happened. She knew she was giving her attached friend sincere joy in thus sharing her secret and letting her see that so much pleasure had come into her otherwise barren life.

"She must be nice, Hester," Leonore said, as she gave back the letter, "and Lord Thurso is a kind man. I liked him; but," with her blunt shrewdness, "but I don't want to have anything to say to Lady Thurso; she is false, she is bad, and, what is more, she is cruel. I don't like her."

"Oh, Leo!" Hester said gently, but her heart gave a little thrill at these words. She had never canvassed Violet or her nature with Leonore; when she had spoken she had spoken kindly of her step-sister. This straightforward criticism pained her, for Leonore, though not by any means clever or quick-witted, had a curious sense of judging things, and rarely made mistakes.

It struck Hester sorrowfully that this sense had come back to the girl in the most vital case, and that though she loved still with all the fervour of her poor trusting heart, she did not shut her eyes to the nature of the man she loved and was about to marry. No words were spoken on this subject, however, and Hester had only her own consciousness to work upon. With Violet it was different, and Leonore found much to say.

"I don't see what she wants with you, Hester. She never cared to come and visit you before. She is sly. I don't like her—no, I don't like her—for all her laughs, and her yellow hair, and her big blue eyes. She isn't you, and she can't hold a candle to you—there!"

"Oh! you most prejudiced person," laughed Hester, and then the subject dropped. The next day brought Sir Charles Maxwell on the scene, and on the following day Leonore Leighton fulfilled the desire of her dead plebeian father's heart, and was transformed by ceremony of vow and ring and book into Lady Maxwell, wife of one of the first baronets of the day, mistress of a position which would place her among the very highest in the land, and in a society which otherwise could and would possibly never have received her, her great wealth notwithstanding.

Up in Scotland the autumn had come with a great rush. It was very cold, and the wind blew sharply across the moors up to the gaunt grey stone house where Lady Alice Carne and her mother had resided ever since their hurried departure from town on account of Lady Emma Talbot's serious illness.

Thurso's best-loved sister seemed to have grown a little older since that bygone night in his smoking den, when they had sat and chatted confidentially together. She was certainly thinner, and there was a thoughtful anxious look on her pretty sympathetic face.

She was standing beside one of the big rather dreary-looking windows of the large cold room; the landscape beyond was bleak and depressing. Lady Alice shivered as she stood drumming on the window pane. There was a fire in the room, but though it blazed cheerily half-way up the big grate it did not give out much warmth.

Lady Alice was tired and heart-weary. They had been long, sad weeks for her, the ones that had passed since last she had seen her brother.

The events that had come had been great ones, and had cast heavy burdens on to the girl's young shoulders, for she was left to

bear the brunt of her mother's austere anger and horror at Lord Thurso's rebellious marriage absolutely alone.

Poor little Lady Alice! she was driven nearly distracted between love and loyalty to her brother, and love and sympathy for her mother. It had been well-nigh an impossible task to minister to that mother's proud, resentful grief. At all times, Lady Thurso had been a difficult, bigoted woman; she had been revered rather than loved by her children, and her son's hasty and ill-chosen marriage was a shock that tended in every way to harden still further a nature already too hard.

The thought of reconciling the Dowager Lady Thurso to the young Lady Thurso was one that was hedged about with hopelessness.

Lady Alice felt, as day followed day, that her mother would go to her grave unrelenting in her attitude to Thurso's wife, unforgiving and unsoftened.

It was a bitter prospect for the young girl. She had always adored her brother; it would not have been very difficult to her to have given a full share of love to her brother's wife, but fate stood in the way.

Not unless a miracle happened would old Lady Thurso so much as permit her daughter to even meet with her much-objected-to daughter-in-law; and apart from the sorrow in having to hurt her dear Dick, there was the very natural regret that she might never taste any of the fun and excitement and enjoyment which would constitute every-day life with her brother and his lovely young wife.

It was hard on her to be kept for ever chained in the narrow, monotonous, prejudiced groove of her mother's existence; and the child fretted and grew weary, and sometimes shed tears at the sad, grey gloom of her daily life, and her equally grey future.

The episode about Hester had been as a gleam of warm, hot sun in this gloom, and the arrival of Hester's letters her one excitement.

She was standing, now, looking out for a messenger who had volunteered to ride over to the nearest post-office and fetch any correspondence from thence that might have arrived.

"He can't be back yet," the girl said to herself several times; and then her face took a sudden tinge of colour, and her eyes sparkled. "Hurrah! here he is! He is a brick, and no mistake. Really, I had no idea Billy could be so kind."

She scampered out of the room and fled through cold stone passages till she encountered a young man striding towards her, his strong limbs encased in rough corduroy riding gear, and a healthy glow on his tanned face.

"Come along back to the library. You are no end of a good fellow," cried Lady Alice, in glee; "and you have got quite a package. That is for me, isn't it, Billy dear?"

Billy dear showed the writing on the label, and Lady Alice gave a sigh of delight.

"From Hester. How lovely!" she said.

"You and this Hester appear to find a great deal to say to one another," the young man observed, as he stood with his back to the fire and watched her tearing open her treasures.

"Of course we have," Lady Alice remarked, intent on discovering what was inside the package.

She gave a little cry of pleasure as the brown paper opened at last and a square mounted picture met her eyes.

"Oh!" she said; then after a short, intense gaze, "Oh! isn't she beautiful? Billy, come and look!"

Billy leaned over the pretty shoulder. "By Jove! yes. She is a stunner. Who is she, Alice?"

"This is Hester!" Lady Alice said, proudly, "Hester Trefusis, my friend. This is the picture she promised me weeks ago. Oh! I had no idea she would be as beautiful as this. I was sure she would be nice; but like this!"

"Drawn by herself, too!" exclaimed Mr.

Wilfred Crossley, pointing to an inscription below the delicately sketched head. "She must be jolly clever. I say, Alice, I should like to meet this Hester Trefusis. I suppose there will be a chance one of these days, eh?"

"What for—another flirtation?" laughed Lady Alice, though a close observer would have seen that her pretty lips trembled just a little. "You don't suppose that sort of face," pointing to the pictured Hester, "goes in for flirtation, do you?"

"One never knows," Mr. Crossley remarked, stroking his light golden-brown moustache meditatively.

Lady Alice had buried herself in her letters; she put Hester's aside to read by and by, and hurriedly opened one from her brother.

"Oh! Billy," she cried, in acutest disappointment, after she had skimmed through it. "Dick writes and entreats me to go to them on a visit. There is going to be all sorts of fun. Oh! I should so like to go, but mother will never, never hear of it. Oh! isn't it hard!" and there were tears in the soft eyes.

"Let me speak to Lady Thurso," offered Billy, valiantly, though his soul quaked within him at the very bare idea of such a desperate resource.

Lady Alice laughed through her tears.

"Billy Billy!" she said, not ungenially. "No, there is only one way if Dick really wants me, really and truly—well, he must come and fetch me himself. I shall never get away unless he does."

Mr. Crossley turned pale.

"Oh! Alice," he said, instantly, "Lady Thurso will kill him!"

He told himself, suddenly, he would not be in Thurso's shoes for a good deal.

"It is the only way," Lady Alice, answered, recklessly. "They must meet some day, too; and oh! Billy, I am so tired of—of all this. I do want to enjoy myself so much, and I do want to see Dick again, and then I should see Hester too. Oh! Billy dear, dear Billy, do say I am not very selfish, and beastly, and—"

Mr. Crossley had a prompt reply to this speech.

"Here, give me a form; we will just telegraph to Thurso, that will bring him quick, and then I will take it to Drumhearna office and he will get it to-night, and he will come here right away; and never say again, Alice, I don't help you to be happy, that's all, though you do sneer at my flirtations and call me a boy, nothing more!"

"You are an angel, Billy, not a boy, and I—"

Lady Alice pulled herself up quickly, "and I am very much obliged to you," with sudden dignity; then more quickly, "Oh! Billy, do you think Dick will come? It seems too good to be true."

"I don't think; I know," was the answer. And when late that night a telegram arrived at the big house on the moor, it was given to Lady Alice Carne, and it told her briefly that her brother was travelling up to Scotland without any farther delay.

(To be continued.)

ONE of the most curious stones in the world is found in Finland, where it occurs in many places. It is a natural barometer, and actually foretells probable changes in the weather. It is called *semakuir*, and turns black shortly before an approaching rain, while in fine weather it is mottled with spots of white. For a long time this curious phenomenon was a mystery, but an analysis of the stone shows it to be a fossil mixed with clay and containing a portion of rock salt and nitre. The fact being known, the explanation was easy. The salt, absorbing the moisture, turned black when the conditions were favourable for rain, while the dryness of the atmosphere brought out the salt from the interior of the stone in white spots on the surface.



## A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

## CHAPTER XXXIX—(continued.)

"What do you mean?" Lionel asked, hoarsely. "Why should you not believe it?"

"Because I could almost swear that I have seen her here in this very house, alive and well," answered Best, quietly.

A wild delight that was almost like insanity filled Lionel Warrender's heart for a brief moment; then the memory of all that it would mean to him, to his mother, and to the woman whom the world called his wife, rushed over him. He stood and stared at Best, unable to frame a word, his horror knowing no bounds.

"I thought I should interest you after a time," said Best, after a long, dramatic silence. "Now try to listen to me, and think like a man of sense, for once in your life. This may mean nothing. It may all be a mistake, and it may be the most awful emergency that a man ever had to face. Answer a few questions as clearly and concisely as you can. Did you ever hear Brenda Bernstein speak of a cousin who was as like her as a sister?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear her speak of a family related to her very closely, named Goodwin?"

"No."

"I thought not. I want to see that old Jew the day before yesterday. I represented myself as an attorney who had a legacy in his possession for a Miss Annie Goodwin, whom I understood was a relative of his. He answered that he had no such relative. If that is true, then this girl who was here as a companion to Bessie Clifton is Brenda. Remember, Lionel, that now is no time for half measures. If you are in this hole, I am the only one who can help you out of it, and it is to my interest to do it. Don't hesitate to tell me the truth. Were you ever married to that girl?"

"Yes."

"Good Heavens! You are a greater fool than even I took you for."

"No; less of a scoundrel."

"Frame it as you like, the fact remains the same. But what in Heaven's name can be done? What is the girl's object? For that it is she I am as certain as that I live. What object is she striving to attain?"

"If it is as you surmise," exclaimed Lionel, hoarsely, "she is not striving to attain any object but to keep me in ignorance that she is alive. We must find the girl at once, and ascertain if she is really—my wife."

"For what purpose?" asked Best, with a world of meaning in his evil eye.

Lionel understood. He lifted his hat and raised his head to Heaven.

"That justice may be done in spite of all the world!" he cried, reverently.

"Heaven!" exclaimed Best, grinding his teeth in rage. "You are a greater fool than I thought. It goes beyond that. You are mad; stark, staring, hopelessly mad!"

He stalked away, knowing that what had to be done he must do alone, and passionately regretting that he had told Lionel anything of his fears.

## CHAPTER XL.

TEN days had elapsed since the death of May Cass, and Willie was rapidly convalescing. Miss Graham and Brenda had been retained as nurses after the death of May, and the regular night nurse discharged as unnecessary; then later, when the danger for Willie had passed, and Miss Graham felt that it was safe to leave him to the charge of Miss French alone, she had gone where her services were more required—to those others whom death was threatening.

Brenda had grown to love the little fellow very dearly during his illness, and had watched him with the tender care that only a mother can feel, and particularly a mother who has known grief.

And Mrs. Cass was grateful. Her sorrow was too great for her dead little one to allow her to give the attention to Willie that she otherwise would have done, but she understood and appreciated the tenderness that he had received from his paid nurse.

"She has been more like a mother to him than I have," Mrs. Cass said to Doctor Hastings. "She may not be a professional nurse in so far as a diploma from a training-school is concerned, but for devoted attention I have never seen her equal, and I should prefer her to any woman with a thousand diplomas, for children. You have discovered a treasure, Doctor."

And Doctor Hastings thought so, too.

She followed his directions with wonderful judgment and accuracy. And the child grew to love her, and would obey her slightest wish. There is so much in that in the handling of children.

"It is most extraordinary," Doctor Hastings would say to himself, as he watched her going about her work, silently, gracefully. "I wish I knew the story of that girl's life. Poor little thing! She has been almost happy in this sorry work. How graceful she is! like a princess in disguise. I wonder that Cass and his wife have not suspected her. I could see with half an eye that she is not what she represents herself to be."

"Willie is almost well enough for me to leave him," she said, with a smile, looking up and finding his eyes fixed upon her.

"Yes, in another week," said the doctor, indulgently. "You must take all the rest that you can in that time, so that you will be ready to begin again upon a fatiguing case. There are plenty of them awaiting you, and I know now that I can trust you. You have been very faithful and true, little woman."

Tears started to Brenda's eyes.

"It is so good of you to say that!" she exclaimed.

"Not at all; because you deserve it. In cases of children you are really a wonderful nurse. It is a sort of gift, you know. I don't know what you would do with an adult patient, but next to Miss Graham you are certainly the best I have come in contact with, and you have one advantage over her—you don't go to sleep at a critical time."

"If that is true, I ought not to be idling here."

The doctor smiled.

"You have been very hardly worked for a beginner, and have needed the rest, but next week you shall begin again with renewed strength."

He patted her upon the cheek, and left her there with the convalescent child.

The day following, Mrs. Cass was in the room when he called. He took the child's temperature, attended to the regular routine, and pronounced him still doing well; then, with a sigh, he joined Mrs. Cass.

"You look harassed and weary, doctor," she exclaimed, with much sympathy. "Is the contagion worse?"

"Yes. I have scarcely slept. The city is scourged from end to end. The poor little victims are falling on every side. I am sorry to tell you that there is a case that I sadly feared I should have to report."

"You mean—"

"In your cousin's family."

"What?"

"Yes, Norton Warrender. I was called to see him last night about twelve, and have been there again this morning. He is terribly ill."

No one had noticed the little nurse who stood in the shadow listening as if her very soul were at stake. Her hands were pressed tightly over her rapidly beating heart, as if to still it. Her eyes contained a look of horror that would have startled them had they seen it.

"She has done it on purpose," she was saying to herself. "That woman—his wife. I saw it in her face that day. I knew it! Oh, Heaven! I knew it!"

Then she tried to cease thinking, that she might bear.

"I begged Violet not to go to the children," cried Mrs. Cass, her grief for little Norton very real. "I knew how it would be, for I had done the same awful thing myself. I am responsible for my baby's death, as she will be for his, and she will never know the awful horror of grief until she feels that. Is he very ill, doctor?"

"Very ill. I have not had a case that was so bad in the beginning. Well, I must go now. I am going back there this afternoon to see him. Poor little fellow! His chances are very small, I fear."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"I am afraid it is."

He said a few words more which did not reach Brenda, then turned wearily to leave the room. Brenda ran almost breathlessly through another room and met him in the hall as he would have left the house.

She had taken a hasty glance at herself, reflecting with wonderful rapidity upon the chances of recognition; but feeling safe in her disguise, she determined to brave the dangerous situation.

"Doctor!" she cried, faintly—"wait!"

"What is it, little woman?" he asked, turning to her.

"I want you to tell me about that—that child!" she cried, hoarsely.

"You mean Warrender's?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing to tell, except that the child is very ill."

"Doctor"—in a trembling, half-hysterical voice—"you told me yesterday that I was unusually good in nursing children. You meant it, did you not?"

"Yes, certainly I did."

"Then let me go to that child. Willie Cass does not need me any longer. His own ordinary nurse is perfectly competent to care for him now. Let me go to that child, Doctor Hastings, will you not?"

She was striving to keep the anxious pleading out of her voice, and the very effort she was making was most apparent to the quick-witted doctor. That fact was not revealed to her, however, in his answer.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, brusquely. "You need the rest. You are worn out, and will be in bed yourself if you don't take rest. Besides, Norton has Miss Graham."

"But suppose her old failing should overcome her, doctor, and she should go to sleep when the baby needs her most? She is much more fatigued and worn than I am. For Heaven's sake, don't refuse me, Doctor."

"Will you tell me why you are so in earnest?"

"No; I cannot—at least, not now. You promised to be my friend without questioning me in any way. The time has now come for the test. It is more than my life that I am asking of you. Let me go to that child! I can save his life. I will save it, if it costs my own. For the love of Heaven, doctor, let me go!"

The effort was too great, and she had ceased to try to control herself. The tears were pouring over her white cheeks. She had removed the glasses from her eyes in her earnestness, and their strained, haggard expression almost frightened him.

He placed his hand gently upon her head. Some look in her countenance had brought back to him the beautiful face of the sick child. The old doctor, who had known so many of life's mysteries, was puzzled.

"You are excited, little woman," he said, quietly. "That is not a good quality in a nurse. Do you know that if anyone else saw you in this state over a child that you never saw, it would arouse curious questioning?"

"I can't help it!" she cried, desperately. "Let me go, and I promise you that you

shall have no cause of complaint against me. I will control myself in everything."

"Well—well!" he exclaimed, soothingly. "Calm yourself, and I will see to it. Of course, I have no right to promise for these people, but I will speak to them on the subject and do what I can."

"But"—she hesitated, and placed her hand upon his arm, lifting her eyes pleadingly, desperately to his—"don't tell that—woman. Mr. Warrender's—wife—that it is my desire. Tell her anything but that; because—she might not let me come, you know."

"All right!" he returned, with a sigh. "I will do the best I can."

"Thank you, and Heaven bless you!" She went back to her charge, feeling half suffocated under the awful fear for her child's life that was upon her, yet compelled to stifle her grief and bear it with the stony calm to which the professional nurse must accustom herself.

A half hour passed in that way—a half hour that seemed to contain years instead of minutes, and then a messenger-boy asked for her. He had brought a note to her, and one also for Mrs. Cass. Her own was very simple. It read,—

"DEAR MISS FRENCH.—Mr. Lionel Warrender desires that you come this afternoon prepared to nurse his little boy. I have written Mrs. Cass, asking her to excuse you."

"Very truly yours,

"F. HASTINGS."

## CHAPTER XLII.

It was Agnes Blunt who admitted the trembling figure of the nurse into the stately edifice that Lionel Warrender called home.

How Brenda ever kept herself from crying out in her surprise and excitement at seeing again the girl whom she had believed so much her friend, she could never afterward remember; but Agnes attributed the quiver in her voice to the fatigue of constant nursing when the little person, with the appearance of a Quaker even emphasized more than before, said,—

"I come from Doctor Hastings to nurse the child who is ill."

"I thought so when I saw you coming up the steps," answered Agnes. "Will you come this way?"

She led the way to a room that was to be Brenda's own during the term of her stay in that house.

"If you will take off your bonnet," Agnes said, "I will take you to the baby."

"How is he?" asked Brenda, putting her question as briefly and quietly as possible, yet waiting in a tumult of excitement for the answer.

"Very ill," answered Agnes, a curious expression crossing her face. "The doctor looked very grave when he was here. My own opinion is that the child will not live two days."

Brenda started. Had not Agnes been occupied to the exclusion of everything else by her own thoughts, she must of necessity have seen the sudden paling of the nurse's countenance; but she was not thinking of the Quaker-like little woman before her. Her thoughts were occupied with that Judas kiss that Violet Warrender had imprinted upon the lips of the hapless child—a kiss which Agnes understood but too well.

She made no further remark, but stood staring out of the window until Brenda had changed her bonnet for a cap, and had covered the front of her plain dark gown with an apron. It was even then Brenda who broke the silence.

"I am ready," she said, quietly. "Will you take me to the child?"

Agnes turned in silence and led the way. She softly opened the door of a darkened chamber, motioned Brenda to enter, and, not

following her, closed the door as noiselessly as she had opened it.

Coming from the light into the comparative darkness for a moment blinded Brenda; then, too, her heart was beating to suffocation; but after a moment her eyes became accustomed to the shadow, and she advanced silently.

A child was lying upon a prettily draped brass bed, moaning faintly, and beside the bed, stroking the little hand with infinite gentleness, a man sat. His blonde hair was dishevelled, his face pale, his eyes haggard from too apparent care and sleeplessness.

In an instant she had recognized Lionel. She stood like a statue in the centre of the floor, unable to move, looking with breathless interest upon the tableau—her husband and her child.

Under the paralysis upon her, the wonder is that she did not die. Perhaps it was only the remembrance that upon her the life of her child depended that kept her from it. There was the rush of mighty waters in her ears and the swirl of clouds before her eyes; but she did not faint. Lionel Warrender had not heard her enter, and there was sufficient time for her to recover herself before it was necessary for her to speak.

When she felt that she could do so, she went forward and stood beside him.

She had grown strangely calm in those few minutes, and when she spoke her voice was still, almost cold.

"You are Mr. Warrender; I presume?" she said. "I am the nurse whom Doctor Hastings sent."

That was all. The voice was changed under the strain upon it; but still Lionel started when it fell upon his ear there in the silence of what seemed to him the chamber of death.

He arose and looked at her curiously. Such a simple little figure it was! The lithe, beautifully rounded form was closed in a gown of Quakerish cut, the greyish hair surmounted by a cap, the eyes covered by a pair of ordinary nose-glasses. And how cold and grim she looked! Yet he sighed before replying.

"Yes," he said, his voice husky under his anxiety for the child. "I am Mr. Warrender, and this is the child. Doctor Hastings tells me that you are a most superior nurse for children. If you succeed in saving this child's life, there is nothing you can ask of me that I shall deny. I will make you rich. His life is more to me than my own—ten thousand times more. I love him as no man has ever loved his child; I know that it all depends upon you. But save him for me, and there is no extent to which you may not command me!"

How Brenda's heart beat! In that moment hearing him speak like that of his child—she felt that she could forgive him all the past without the asking. For those words she felt that she could serve him blindly during all the rest of her life, suffering anything for herself. All the old resentments rolled away, and in its place swept in the warm, yearning, girlish love that had filled her heart in those old happy days—love that had never died, but that had been so painfully accursed.

She was thankful for the sacrifice that she had been able to make for him—grateful that she had been able to suffer for him. She uttered a prayer in the depths of her own heart that ran something like this,—

"Oh, gracious Heaven, let me save the life of the child for him, and then let me die, that no evil may ever befall him through me!"

She did not reply aloud at once, but when she could control her voice, she answered, more gently than before:

"If his life depends upon devoted nursing, you may be sure that it shall be saved. You need not fear to trust him to me."

Tears choked the utterance of the unhappy father. He put out his hand and clutched that of the nurse. They stood so for some

minutes beside their child before he could speak.

Something in the plain, Quakerish figure seemed to draw him to her, and he understood, with a feeling of thanksgiving, that he could trust her.

"Thank you," he said, simply. "I feel that I may, and half my anxiety is gone in the thought. I wish you to have entire charge here, and to allow no one in the room that you do not desire."

"But Miss Graham is my superior."

"No; Miss Graham was taken ill this morning and could not remain. She is worn out. You look jaded yourself, I'm afraid."

"You need not be. I am not tired. Don't distress yourself. You may be sure that what there is in the power of mortal woman to do to save this child's life, I shall do."

She had forgotten herself, and the earnestness of her remark surprised him. He looked at her curiously for a moment, then bowed gratefully.

"Are there any orders that you wish given now?" he asked.

"Yes. I want absolute quiet for the child—mind, I say absolute. Let no one enter this room unless I ring, except the doctor."

"But you can't do it all alone. You must have an assistant."

"You may get that. But I am to have entire charge, you said; consequently, she is only to be summoned when I require rest. I shall remain with him myself to-day and to-night. Will you give the order that no one is to enter unless I ring?"

"I will; but you do not exclude me, I hope. I promise that I shall be very obedient. You must let me come; for I tell you that I could not endure it. I love the child, I—I—he has no mother. Surely you know what that means to a child."

And then the desire seized her to know what he would say of himself in connection with her baby. She turned to him swiftly, unable to control the question that arose to her lips.

"But you?" she exclaimed, her voice trembling slightly. "What are you to him? Only his adopted father, as I understand it, and he has your wife for a mother. She loves him as much as you do, does she not?"

He hesitated, his face colouring deeply; then a sudden resolution came to him, one of those impulses that we each have felt and have not the power to control—an impulse to which some of us have yielded only to regret later, and to which others owe all the happiness of a life. He was yearning for comfort. His heart was torn with grief over the child, and turning passionately to the nurse, he cried out:

"I am trusting you with the secret of my life. You see what this is to me in that I do it. If the child dies, nothing matters, neither life nor death, and if he lives, I can endure anything for his sake. He is mine; the son of the one love of my whole life. He is all I have left of a precious past that I lost and destroyed because I was too great a coward to trust the woman who loved and trusted me. That boy is all that is left of my happiness and I can not lose him—I can not!"

The great, strong man had covered his face with his hands and was sobbing aloud.

For a moment Brenda felt that she must throw her arms about his neck; that she must beg his pardon on bended knee for the wrong that she had done him; that she must comfort him with her tenderness and love; and then memory returned.

She remembered all that it would mean to him, all the sorrow and shame and disgrace, and she knew that she dared not speak.

She stood there listening to his sobbing in heartbreaking silence, then watched him leave the room when he could bear it no longer.

When she knew that he was gone, and that she was alone, she began her duties to the child by falling upon her knees and praying to God for them both, praying as she had never done before in all the bitterness of her wretched life.



CHAPTER XLII.

BUT with all Brenda's care and attention, the baby seemed to grow no better.

For several days she scarcely left him, hovering about his bed both night and day, doing all that lay in mortal power to do, and taking only that rest that was necessary to keep her from positive collapse.

"You have sent me a treasure, Doctor Hastings," Lionel said to the physician one day, as they stood together beside the bed. If Norton dies it will not be from lack of nursing. I don't know how I am ever to repay the care that she has taken of him. It has gone beyond that of woman: She is an angel!"

And Brenda heard with a quivering of the heart what would have been ecstasy but for the terrible fear that was constantly hovering over her.

Doctor Hastings looked more grave than usual. He was still more convinced that the secret of Brenda's life was connected with that household; but that Lionel knew nothing of it he felt also assured.

"He has not penetrated the disguise," the doctor told himself. "It is the nurse, the possible saviour of his child, in whom he is interested, whom he sees, not the woman; and yet how any man could help seeing her is a mystery which I cannot solve. She could never walk through a room, even under that disguise, without attracting my attention."

But Lionel thought nothing of all that. There was one thing upon which Brenda had not counted when she entered that house, and that was the number of hours she was forced to pass alone in that room with her child and her husband. It was a terrible trial to her at first, but her anxiety for the child was so great that she scarcely saw Warrender sometimes, and at others he would enter the room and leave it with scarcely a word to her.

He saw a great tear splash upon the baby's face one day as he stood beside her when she had not heard him enter, and his heart went out to her.

"Do you think he is worse, Miss French?" he asked, with a contraction of the heart that was intensest agony.

She glanced up, startled to see him, but regained her composure almost at once.

"It is so difficult to tell," she answered, drearily. "Certainly he is no better, and the faintest change for the worse would mean death."

"You are very tired," he said, gently. "I don't believe you have slept at all for two nights. You cannot stand that. Had you not better lie down and let me call the other nurse?"

She shook her head.

"No," she answered; "I shall stay. If any change came and I were not here—"

She broke the sentence abruptly, her voice filling with the tears she was too weak to control.

"You don't know how grateful to you I am, dear Miss French," Ward said, gently, his own voice quivering with emotion. "It goes beyond anything that I can frame into words. I don't believe the baby's own mother, if she could come down to him from Heaven, could have cared for him as you have done. If he lives or dies, I want you to believe that you have an eternal friend in me who would go to any length to serve you. One could almost fancy that you love the child yourself."

"Love him!"

The voice broke, choked with anguish. He looked at her in alarm.

"There!" he exclaimed, soothingly. "You are tired to death. I wish, if only to oblige me, that you would lay down for awhile. I promise you that I will sit here myself, and if any change comes, however small, I will waken you at once."

"Don't ask me!" she exclaimed. "I could not!"

"Then wait a little."

He went out, and a moment later she heard

the key turn in a door that separated the child's room from another. It swung open, and she saw Lionel Warrender rolling in a great invalid's chair from his own apartment. He placed it in a cozy corner opposite the bed, where she could see every expression of the child's face, half filled it with pillows, then, when he had fastened the door again, he returned to Norton's room.

"There!" he exclaimed, with a smile. "Now I insist upon your lying down in that chair. You will be right here then. I shall call no one, but remain in your seat, wakening you if you are needed. Can't you trust me that far, Miss French?"

She dared not reply, because of the tears in her voice. She could resist him no longer, but arose meekly and climbed into the chair. He arranged it for her himself and threw his own embroidered cover over her.

"Let me see how well trained you are by seeing how long it will take you to go to sleep," he said, with a smile.

She smiled back at him, faintly, tremulously, longing with all her poor, tired heart to throw her arms about his neck, to lay her weary head upon his breast and weep out her very soul.

She had learned so much of him in these days—so much that she had never guessed in the sweet time of long ago. There was a tenderness, a gentleness, a self-sacrifice in his nature that she had never known. Was it there in the old days? Had there been a secret that he could not—dared not tell her?

She recalled a thousand times his words to her when she had first come: "I was too great a coward to trust the woman who loved and trusted me."

Had the fault been here, then? Had it all been lack of trust on her part that had caused all their bitter woe?

She had longed to know it all—to find the real answers to her questions—as she lay there in the great chair that he had placed for her and watched him as he sat beside her boy. She remembered that she had listened to and believed Agnes when she had said that Lionel did not love their baby. Did this look like lack of love?

Clearly she had not understood him. There were the traces in the handsome face of an awful grief that was still alive in his heart, and it all came to her more clearly than ever as she watched him.

He arose when he thought she slept, and closed the window softly behind her; then he paused beside her and looked down upon her as he would have passed. He did not speak, but stood there, and she opened her eyes and smiled.

He might have known that no woman ever smiled like that into the face of a man whom she did not love; but Lionel Warrender thought little of that.

"Did I disturb you?" he asked, remorsefully. "I am so sorry. I was afraid the draught from that window would give you cold."

"I was not asleep."

"Then you are now a well-trained nurse. I ought to scold you. You will break down, and then Norton will die. You see I am utterly selfish."

"I shall never break down while he needs me," she answered, faintly.

He leaned over and kissed one of the hands that lay upon the arm of the chair.

"Forgive me!" he said, gently. "Perhaps I should not have done that, but you are more the angel than the woman to me. I wonder if there are many like you in the world, Miss French?"

He leaned against the casing of the window, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and looked down upon her, the smile still upon his face.

How changed he was! There was scarcely a trace of the boyish lover who had won her heart in those dear days, and yet how infinitely preferable this man was to that. There was everything in this man's favour

over that, and yet she thought him perfect then. Oh, Heaven! if she could only go back to that time, how different their lives might be!

And the hardest part of it all to bear was that she knew that she was crying out against the only thing impossible with Heaven itself—to give back yesterday.

She had almost forgotten his question in her reflections until recalled by the expression of his face.

"We are none of us angels," she answered, slowly; "and all women are like me."

"I wonder if you believe that?" he asked incredulously.

"Certainly I do."

"Then will you try to honestly answer a question that I should like to put to you?"

"I will answer it honestly if I answer it at all."

"Thank you. Then try to suppose, if you can, that you were my wife. Suppose that in my youth I had loved a woman, that I had made her my wife, that to us was born a child, and that after my first wife's death I had married you, without telling you of the secret marriage I had contracted. Suppose that afterward, when you and I had been married for some time, I should tell you the truth and beg your forgiveness for the past. What would you do?"

She was trembling like an aspen.

"I should forgive you," she answered; "perhaps because there would be nothing else to do, and I should make the best of the situation by trying to make you love me as you had never loved her."

Lionel Warrender did not reply. He looked at her for a moment in silence, then noiselessly walked over to the bedside of the baby and took his place beside him.

"Go to sleep!" he said, almost curtly, to the nurse.

She closed her eyes, appearing to obey him, but in her own heart she was crying out—

"He has told her the truth, and she is making his life a perdition. Heaven help you, my poor Lionel, and help me to save you from any further suffering! Let come to me what may, I will save your child for you, and then I will go—where, it matters not. This is the bitterness of death—that I do not trust you when your heart was all mine! My punishment is just—cruelly just!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

BRENDA had slept perhaps an hour, when she awakened with a start to find Lionel smiling at her. She rose hastily, doubtful as to where she was for the moment, then put her hands up quickly to adjust her cap.

"You are all right," he said, kindly, "and have had a capital sleep, only it was not long enough. I shall come often now, and see myself that you take the rest you need. Do you feel less tired?"

"Wonderfully refreshed, thank you," she stammered. "Has there been any change in Norton?"

"No. He awakened once, but went to sleep again shortly after, and has been almost motionless ever since. He has had the most quiet sleep I have seen him enjoy."

He stood beside her and looked down upon the child; then, fearful lest he should wince the little one from his sleep, Lionel nodded to her and quietly left the room.

She still stood there, looking intently down upon the child.

There was a great change taking place, and she saw it. His countenance was exactly like that of Willie Cass when the change came for him; but Doctor Hastings had been there at the time, and she remembered that he did not know whether it meant life or death.

"If the child awakes from this sleep to consciousness," the doctor had said of Willie, "he will live."

How that speech returned to her in th

moment! Her heart leapt into her throat and threatened to choke her. She knew that the turning-point had come in her son's life, and that nothing could be done but watch and wait—and pray.

She had forgotten Lionel—forgotten everything under heaven except that boy—and dropping on her knees there beside that bed, held the little hand, with her fingers on the faint pulse, and prayed.

How earnestly she prayed only Heaven and herself could have told. How terribly she suffered in her awful anxiety! She longed with all her soul to take the little form in her arms, to call the life back into those almost stagnant veins at the cost of her own. Her glasses were thrown aside in that supreme moment, for everything was forgotten save her mother-love.

Once the under-nurse came and looked in, but she saw her superior kneeling there with the tiny wrist between her fingers, and slipped quietly away. In the hall she met Agnes.

"How is the baby?" his former nurse asked.

"I don't know. He seems to be sleeping," the professional answered. "I did not dare interrupt Miss French."

Agnes went her way, entering the room of Violet Warrender with a gown she had been sent to fetch.

She was paler and more bitter than ever; but little attention was paid to her in those days. Her soul was in rebellion against Lionel Warrender, who had refused to allow her in the sick-room of the child to whom she had been almost a mother, and there was no injury she would not have done him, had it been in her power. But there seemed to be no evil that she could work. She was helpless, impotent in strength.

"Thank you, Agnes," Mrs. Warrender had said, as the girl entered. "Will you send an order to Madame Henri to come to-morrow?"

"Yes, madame."

"How is Norton?"

"I can not tell you, madame."

"How is that? You used to seem so devoted to the child."

"And am yet. But Mr. Warrender has issued orders that no one is to enter that room without the permission of the head nurse. She has only permitted me to enter once."

"And does no one go there?"

"No one but Mr. Warrender, madame; and he stays there more than half his time. They sit together there, and— But I beg your pardon, madame. I confess to feeling rather sore over the fact that I am allowed to see Norton so rarely—I who have had charge of him all his life. It is natural that I should not feel too pleasantly disposed toward the woman who has shut me out, nor toward Mr. Warrender, who has allowed it. But that should not excuse me for telling tales of either of them."

"Why, Agnes," exclaimed Violet, with a laugh, "you are entirely too virtuous? Of course it should excuse you. What do they do?"

"Nothing, I dare say, madame, that one ought to repeat, because there can be nothing in it; but Mr. Warrender took the great chair out of his room himself to-day, with the embroidered cover you gave him. He covered her up in it, and she slept there while he watched beside the baby. They would not even call the under-nurse."

"How do you know that, Agnes?"

"I saw him do it through the window."

A dark shadow crossed Violet's face. It was not that she was jealous of the nurse. She did not suspect for a moment that there were any relations between her husband and his child's nurse that even she would not have sanctioned; but it was jealousy of the child that enraged her. But she did not care to make an exhibition of that fact to Agnes. She laughed with an affectation of carelessness.

"It sounds so funny, doesn't it?" she said, lightly. "The idea of his waiting upon that

curious-looking creature in that way! Why, she is old enough to be his—"

Agnes forgot herself sufficiently far to interrupt her mistress.

"Are you sure, madame?" she cried. "I have had some doubts of the woman. Might she not be a young woman in disguise?"

Violet started.

"What impossibilities are you talking, Agnes?" she asked, sharply.

"I don't know," cried the girl; "but it seems to me sometimes that everything can't be right. I am sure, to do him justice, that Mr. Warrender does not suspect it; but there is something wrong. She has a manner that is not natural. Don't ask me what it means, madame, for I can't answer, not knowing. I am sure Mr. Warrender does not know. But what is it, and why?"

Agnes had not intended to say so much. She had not meant to utter any words beyond a simple complaint, believing that Violet would insist upon her entrance into the sick-room, and she had allowed herself to be carried away until she had spoken all her suspicions.

Violet arose slowly.

"It is curious," she said, musingly. "That is the woman who tried to prevent my seeing Mrs. Cass's children. I wonder if there is anything in it? I must discover."

Meanwhile, in the sick-room, Brenda had ceased to pray, and was watching with bated breath for the change that she knew was coming. The breathing of the child was becoming more regular, the brilliant flush of fever was slowly leaving; yet she scarcely dared even then to hope. Her excitement was so intense that her past life was as dead to her as the past itself. She had ceased to remember everything except that it was her child—her own boy who lay there fighting desperately for his little life.

Fear lay upon her heart like a terribly heavy oppression. In her anguished excitement the perspiration stood upon her face like drops of blood. More than once, to prevent the drops from falling upon the face of the child and disturbing that precious sleep, she had put up her hand and thoughtlessly cleansed her brow of moisture.

Her cap had fallen back and the gray wig had become disarranged, but she was not aware of that. It was her baby's life that was hanging in the balance, and she waited while her very heart seemed to have ceased to beat.

Then, while her eyes were fixed upon the little face, his eyes opened and looked into her own. There was a faint, weak smile upon the sweet mouth, and, in a voice that was scarcely audible even to the mother-ear, the baby murmured,—

"You isn't Aggie. Where is Aggie? I like you better. Who is 'oo?"

How wildly her heart plunged! Yet she knew that she dared not excite him. She lifted him in her arms with a word of tenderness—a tenderness that never could be measured—and, in a low voice, she whispered:

"Your mother, my darling—your own heart-hungry mother! Do you understand, my own? Oh, Norton, Norton! If I am to have all my life to live in a grave, I may at least give myself one moment of happiness! Call me 'Mamma,' once, my darling!"

She did not expect him to understand; she did not even want him to understand. But something must be allowed to a starving heart.

"Is 'oo my mamma?" he asked, drowsily.

"Norton is sleepy. 'Oo won't go away, will 'oo?"

"No, my precious one. Go to sleep, my baby. Saved—saved!"

The two last words were whispered with frantic thanksgiving as she saw the little lids close. She felt that she was becoming hysterical—that she was laughing and crying at the same time—and knowing that she must not disturb him, she placed him back upon the bed, then lifted herself from her task with her hands clasped closely, the tears pouring over her face through her smiles.

"Thank Heaven!" she cried. "Thank Heaven! He will live! My boy—my boy!" And then suddenly she became conscious that there was someone just inside the door of the room who had heard her. She knew not how long that silent figure had been standing there; but she suddenly stopped, and the woman came out of the shadow slowly, like some huge animal that waits for an opportunity to spring upon its prey.

They stood looking at each other in silence, Brenda recognizing the face of Lionel Warrender's wife, and Violet recognizing—the face in her husband's pocket!

(To be continued)

## THE HOUSE WITH THE OPEN DOOR.

—o—

OUT of the city!

Evelyn Leroy flicked the dust from the hem of her dark dress with a big branch of golden-rod, and leaving the road, ascended a green knoll and sat down under a tree.

She was three miles from home. It was the longest walk she had ever taken alone in her life.

She had crossed the river bridge, and now sat looking across the water at the city. Fair as it looked, she wished she had never to go back there.

It was the scene of her defeat—of her failure. She was heartsick—passionately miserable. The proud, handsome girl of twenty sat pushing the jewelled rings about on her white fingers, and wishing she were dead—or, better, had never been born.

Quietly as she sat, every look and motion told of unrest. Though absorbed in thought, the languid lifting of her eyelids, the changing red of her satin cheek, and the beautiful rich lips curved in discontent, told of passion and pain.

After all, she was not looking at the river banks, the rich green fields or the distant city. A man's face, fair, reserved, handsome, was before her vision—the face of Vaughan Fenton, her music teacher.

The girl was half mad with pain. She had given her heart, unasked. It was only twenty-four hours since she had betrayed her love, and—ah, shame and misery!—there had been no response.

From childhood it had been a reproach to her that she had no caution. Oh, they had always told her of her faults—her wise, rebuking friends! She had never been a source of pleasure to her guardian or to his family. If her mother had lived, it seemed to her she would never have thrown herself so recklessly at the head of a man who had winning eyes and gentle ways, and did not care for her. She had only a heartache for her folly.

And now if she need never see him again! If she need not go back! That was her one passionate wish.

She observed, at length, that the sun was setting, the lights growing gold and dun around her. Suddenly starting to her feet, she drew a little gold-rimmed portmanteau from her pocket. There were bank-notes in it and some yellow coin. She put it back in her pocket, and walked on.

Across the fields there was a grey farmhouse with an open door. She went toward it. She observed a woodbine that climbed above the door. There was a laburnum tree in the dooryard, lilacs growing thick against the lower windows, but no sign of life.

As she advanced she saw white sheets spread on a slope to bleach, poultry and doves about the door, and at last a woman coming slowly between rows of currant bushes.

She went to the open door and stood there, and the woman came up to her.

"I would like to stay here to-night. Could you receive me?" asked Evelyn.



The woman was tall and grave, and severe of attire. That she was the mistress of the house there seemed no doubt.

She looked at the young lady, at her beautiful face, at her silken attire, at her white, soft hands. She saw more. She read desperation and despair in the dark eyes, eagerness for her assent in the forced, quivering smile. She did not speak at first; then she said, calmly,—

"Do you wish it very much?"

"Very much!" replied Evelyn, quickly.

"You may come in."

Evelyn peered through the open door, and the other followed.

There the wretched girl dwelt, indulging a feeling of liberty, absolute freedom from every past annoyance. Sometimes she would have an hour or two of heartache, and a wonder, too, if she would not be missed by Vaughan Fenton; for before her moment of folly he had spent many a pleasant hour with her.

She tried not to think of this; it was so tinged with bitterness now, and the scene was shifted, and relief from passionate pain was possible.

Apart from the serving of comfortable food and the setting apart of a pleasant chamber for her use, Mrs. Wayne let her guest entirely alone, and nothing could have pleased Evelyn better. Her guardian would be concerned at her disappearance, but she thought of this only with apathy. She regarded her surroundings with a faint curiosity.

Mrs. Wayne's undemonstrativeness—the nonentity, she called her husband—the household simplicity, the old-fashioned garden, she observed as novelties. She went away into the woods by herself; for the first time gathered berries and wild-flowers. She made the discovery that nature was genial and kind.

One day she hurried in out of the rain and closed the porch door by which she had first entered the house. Mrs. Wayne rose hurriedly from her knitting.

"We never close this door—never, at any time," she said, and opened the door wide again.

"Not when it storms?" queried Evelyn.

"Not when it storms," was the reply.

The girl gave the matter only a moment's wonder. But the next day, gathering great bunches of red leaves in a lonely lane, a tow-headed urchin, tending his browsing cows, spoke to her.

"You ain't a country girl. We don't care for them things, we don't. Say, where be you stayin'? 'Tain't true you're livin' in the house with the open door, is it? Never knew Mis' Wayne to take boarders. Odd! She never spoke to no one. Queer place! Is there where you live?"

Evelyn assented, indifferently, binding up the red bunch she held, and then walked on, not finding the boy interesting. But the bare feet kept pace with her.

"Got on an awful pretty dress! You're rich, I know. If my sister had a silk dress like that she'd keep it for her best, an' not be climbin' hills in it. Say, do you know them folks never shut that door day or night, summer nor winter? Mis' Wayne must be crazy, I say. Like medder cat tails? I'll get you some for a penny."

"I'll give you a penny to run away," said Evelyn, taking the coin out of her purse.

"Well, you be a cool un, you be!"

But the boy dropped behind and she wandered on by herself gathering cones and acorns, and examining them minutely.

She was jealous of the solitude which had grown sweet to her. But she was not un-mindful of the lad's words, and she observed, afterward, that she did, indeed, dwell in a house with an open door. What this fact betokened, she could not guess, but she felt no inclination to broach the subject to her hostess.

Mrs. Wayne had respected her reserve. Why should she not respect hers?

And day after day dropped behind, until

weeks had passed, and the hoar frost touched the grass, and the red leaves fluttered down, and the chill autumn weather brought a wide hearth fire and the unlicking of a piano in a niche of the great sitting-room.

"There are books, too, stored in the attic. Go there and get what you like," said Mrs. Wayne, standing tall and thin, before the girl, who observed narrowly now the colourless face. "You must have something to do, now that the bad weather has come, or you will not be content here much longer."

Evelyn responded brightly to the faint, wintry smile.

"I am not wishing to go away, Mrs. Wayne," she replied. "Do I make you very much trouble?"

"No, dear."

The fond word seemed to surprise the woman herself. She started, and turned away.

"I will get something to read," said Evelyn.

She went into the entry, on her way to the attic. The gusty air struck her with a chill; the rain had wet the floor. The door was fastened back by an iron hook; it trembled in the wind, but was held resolutely in its place.

Evelyn stood on the threshold and looked abroad over the wild, wet landscape, with a sense of sadness and mystery, and as she did so it came to her, with a sudden warmth, that she was not unloved by her lonely hostess.

"I am sure she has had an unhappy life. I am glad I came here," she said to herself.

She wondered at the superior character of the books, and at the great boxes of sheet music, she found in the attic. Still, she asked no questions.

It was just at twilight that she touched the keys of the piano, and ran her fingers lightly through the bars of an old melody. She tried to avoid a discord; the piano was out of tune from disuse.

Suddenly she heard hard breathing, and turning her head, encountered the somewhat vacant countenance of diminutive Mr. Wayne. His eyes were distended.

"Did she tell you to do that?" he asked.

Evelyn bowed.

"Well, I never! She's gone out in the storm to get away from the sound. Look there!"

Evelyn looked from the window. There among the blackened currant bushes stood the tall form of Mrs. Wayne. She had her apron over her head and was trembling.

The girl started up.

"No, no—let her be!" interposed the man. "Nobody can't do nothin' with her. She means to break herself probably, or she wouldn't have unlocked that piano. True as I live, it hasn't been touched afore for five years!"

Evelyn was much disturbed. She continued to play, however, as Mr. Wayne had hinted, and soon her hostess passed into the kitchen and continued preparations for supper.

Late at evening, Evelyn again left the piano, and approached Mrs. Wayne who sat with averted face before the open fire.

"Are you quite sure you like to hear me play?" she asked, gently. "Oh, I am sure it gives you pain!" she exclaimed, catching sight of the tear-stained countenance the other had been hiding.

"It is only deserved," answered Mrs. Wayne, after a moment, in a low, trembling voice, very unlike her usual one. "My punishment is just."

Drawn by the wet, sad face, Evelyn knelt down and took the strong, brown hand between her delicate ones. The other's features grew convulsed at this act of sympathy.

"I have pitied you," she said. "Pity me. I have driven my child away from me—my son, my only one!"

And she sobbed uncontrollably.

There was nothing Evelyn could do but stroke the trembling hand she held.

Calmer, at last, Mrs. Wayne said:

"I have been a hard, harsh woman. When I was young I was not so, but my young husband died and left me with a three weeks' infant. I was not fit to take care of the farm, and I was persuaded, in a year or two, to marry again. My second marriage proved uncongenial. I wanted to be understood, loved, counselled, and I would have been yielding and gentle enough with a man wiser and better than I was, but the one I had wedded proved dull, irrational and unsympathising. We had little or nothing in common but pecuniary interests.

"While I was learning this hard lesson, that marriage was henceforth to be nothing to me, my child was growing bright and beautiful. I turned to him for comfort. From a little fellow he was so intelligent, companionable, winning! As he grew older, handsome and manly, I worshipped him. But I had bitter, restless spells when I was dissatisfied even with him, and I grew exacting and arbitrary, and when he was twenty demanded that he should marry a neighbour's daughter, fearing that some remote connection might sever him from me for ever.

"The girl was a docile little thing—I knew I could have my way with her—but he had no fancy for her. I tried to over-rule him, but found that I had no longer a child to deal with. Then I grew hard against him, made him unhappy with needless reproaches, found that my power over him was weakening, and it made me wild. He was all I had, and I loved him so! Yet I made him miserable until I found that he wanted to go away from home.

"That quite crazed me, I think, and one day I held the door open for him to go out. 'Don't shut the door on me, mother,' he said, reproachfully. 'I will!' I said, 'and it will be a long day before I open it again. You are a self-willed, ungrateful son!' I did not know he would take me at my word. I thought he was only spending the night with a school friend. I rose early and set the door wide and fastened it back, but my boy has never passed over that threshold since!"

White and wild, the miserable woman wrung her hands. The girl sought to soothe her.

"But nothing has happened to him—he has not died?" Evelyn returned.

"No, I think not. But long ago he joined a party who went abroad, and I have not heard of him since. He has not forgiven me. He has grown cold to his mother, and though I have repented in dust and ashes, and grown old and sad and patient, I shall die alone! And I deserve it—deserve it!"

But in her weakness she felt the strength of the girl's younger and more hopeful spirit, and it had a quieting effect.

"Child, how beautiful and loving you are!" she said. "I wish you need never leave me. But your young heart knows its griefs, too. Sorrow makes our eyes keen. In spite of your air of prosperity, I knew you were in need when you came here, and my heart, grown merciful, took you in from that first hour. You have been a blessing here, so quiet, sweet and beautiful!"

"Thanks! I need your kindness. Do you think that strange? Never mind; go and rest now. You are quite worn out with weeping. I will read a little while by the fire."

When Evelyn was alone, her hand strayed mechanically to a newspaper a few days old, which had inclosed a package. Newspapers were not common in the house.

Her first glance fell upon the words:

"EVELYN, if you will not communicate with the others, write to one who loves you."  
"V. E."

Her heart bounded. After all—after his fancied coldness, her agony, her shame, after her flight and long discipline—the truth was this: he loved her!

Ah, it was a night of strange revelations, for next her eyes fell upon a name written on the fly-leaf of a book, and it was "Vaughan Fenton."

And when she had examined other books she found it again, and knew that the man she had fled from in her pain was the one longed for in that obscure home.

She could not for the long night close her happy eyes.

In the next evening's paper appeared the line:

"The door is open. Mother."

It was Evelyn's work.

She could not have borne the marks of suffering in her friend's countenance the next day but for her bounding hope that her venture would not miscarry.

But when the next morning she heard the fall of a booted foot at the open door, she feared for the chastened woman.

"You know I encouraged you to hope that Vaughan would come," she said, hurriedly, "and you must not be surprised."

Then she fled.

She saw him come in—tall, strong, fair—and take his mother in his arms.

"I have come back to you, mother—to you, and not to that doll-faced girl."

"Oh, Vaughan, forgive me! Lilly was married long ago!"

"The girl I love I have lost. Comfort me if you can, mother."

Grief swept across his face, then he stood transformed with delight. The girl he loved appeared before him.

"Evelyn!" he cried, and caught the jewelled hands. "Darling, I dared not yield to such happiness. Did you think me cold? It was all a mistake of yours," he said.

And the two women who loved this man most believe that only those who have suffered can enjoy.

## FAETLÉ.

WHEN a song is sung so much that everyone dislikes it, it is called popular.

The farther away a man gets from his baby the more he praises its good behaviour.

"I HEAR that your picnic was a very swell affair." "It was. We all got stung by wasps."

AFTER a woman passes a certain age she would just as soon get married on Friday as on any other day.

THERE is luck in odd numbers. There is more peace in the house if there is but one baby instead of twins.

"How cool poor Smithereens was before the dynamite exploded." "And he was collected afterwards."

SHE: "Oh, George, what shall we do if the boat sinks?" He (very pale): "Never mind about that, Sarah; it's not our boat."

MISS CANDOUR (aged seven, to lady who has been singing with a good deal of tremolo to her mother's guests): "I gargle in the nursery."

MR. BATS: "Look here; if Jones undertakes to pull my ears, he'll find he's got his hands full." Jones (sarcastically): "Right you are, old chappie."

SWEET SIXTEEN: "Do you truly think that May is an unlucky month to get married in?" Sixty-five: "I have tried six different months, and May was no worse than the others."

AT HOME: Young Lady (confidentially to her beau, who is annoyed at her flirtations): "I shall be at home next Sunday evening." Beau (simply): "So shall I, my dear."

DOCTOR: "You will have to take two tablespoonfuls of medicine three times a day." Mrs. O'Flynn: "Then, sor, O'll have to get the loan of a tablespoon, becase I only hev one, sor."

GEORGE: "Did you sell your horse for as much as you paid when you bought him?" John: "Well—er—I sold him for as much as he was worth when I bought him."

CONDUCTOR: "Madam, I am obliged to ask fare for that boy; he looks older than four years." Mother: "He isn't, at all; he has his father's head but his mother's ways."

He tried to swim out farther than the rest To show his skill.

And he was quite successful in the test— He's out there still.

LENA LOTUS: "Why don't you marry? Are you not old enough?" Rivers Ide: "Oh, yea." "Or rich enough?" "I think so." "Well, then?" "I am not foolish enough."

"Oh, my! How foolish do you want to be?" FRIEND: "Were there any accidents during the football match to-day?" Player: "Only one. A mule in the adjoining field broke loose, got mixed up with the game, and was pretty badly hurt."

BENEVOLENT GENT: "You look as if you had been a gentleman." Tramp: "Ah, sir, I was worth thousands and lost it all." B. Gent: "To what vice were you addicted, then?" Tramp: "To friendship, sir."

FACTIOUS DAUGHTER: "Ma, I've had an offer of marriage." Mother: "I'm delighted to hear it, my dear. From whom?" E. D.: "Our clergyman. He says he will marry me when I can find a husband."

EXAMINER: "What do you think would probably have happened if Charles I. had not been executed?" Candidate (after mature consideration): "He would probably have died a natural death."

THE SKIPPER: "I say, Gov'nor, you'd be more comfortable if you didn't lie on your stomach." Feebly from the bottom of the boat: "Stomach—yes—fold it up, please, and—put it in the lining of my hat."

JARVEY to Cooksey Tourist: "This is the Devil's Glen, sor." Tourist: "Indeed. It strikes me the devil owns a lot of property in Ireland." Jarvey: "Yis, sir; but he is an absentee; he lives in London."

PA (introducing his latest matrimonial acquisition to the family): "Now here, my dears, is your new mother, and I hope you will all be great friends." Little Ethel (of the prosaic eye): "But, Pa, she isn't new at all."

LITTLE GIRL: "I see another white hair in your head, mamma! What makes them come?" Mother: "They come when you are naughty and vex me, Ethel." Little Girl: "Dear! dear! How you must have vexed poor grandmamma when you were a little girl?"

MERCHANT: "Your credentials are satisfactory. Have you a grandmother?" Youth: "No, sir." "Any dear old aunts?" "No, sir." "Or great aunts?" "No, sir." "Or any other relatives who will be likely to die during the baseball season?" "N—o, sir." "You'll do."

SHE: "Darling, please tell the grocer to send me up two quarts of nice, fresh sponges." He: "You can't get sponges at the grocer's, dnokey, but I'll stop at the druggist's for them. What kind do you want?" "I want the kind used for sponge cake, and tell him they must be fresh."

THE MINISTER'S WIFE (to industrial scholar): "Eliza Jane, I am sorry to hear from your schoolmistress that you are not diligent at your needlework. You know who it is finds work for idle hands to do?" Eliza Jane (intensely anxious to propitiate): "Yes'm; please'm, you do!"

"BISHOP," said a young Methodist preacher to his spiritual superior, "won't you give me some advice how to gain and keep the love of my congregation?" "Yes, brother," replied the divine: "When you marry, select a woman from some other congregation than your own, and be sure that she is not handsome or stylish in her dress."

He: "Is your father wealthy?" She: "Yes." He: "Is he old?" She: "Very." He: "Mother dead?" She: "Yes." He: "Is your temper good?" She: "They say so." He: "Well, I'll make a memorandum, and perhaps I may see you again before the close of the season."

ANTIQUÉ YOUNG LADY: "You see, my dear count, I often sit under this spreading oak on warm weather evenings and compose my brightest songs to the rustling of the leaves. It is my favourite spot in the whole park." Count: "Ah! I understand; probably made-moisselle planted the oak herself!"

OWES FOR THE SUIT—Cobble: "Widner is the strangest fellow about some things. He wears a sixpenny necktie with a six-guinea suit, and thinks he is saving money." Sions: "Well, he does, doesn't he?" Cobble: "I don't see how." Sions: "He has to pay for the necktie."

A LITTLE fellow, in turning over the leaves of a scrap-book, came upon the well-known picture of some chickens just out of their shell. He examined the picture carefully, and then, with a grave, sagacious look at the lady who sat beside him, slowly remarked, "They came out 'cos they was afraid of being boiled."

A GENTLEMAN lately dismissed a clever but dishonest gardener. For the sake of his wife and family, however, he gave the man a character, and this is how he worded it: "I hereby certify that A.B. has been my gardener for over two years, and during that time he has got more out of my garden than any man I ever employed."

LADY (whose young niece is about to go for a sail with some members of a rowing club): "I should like to go with you, only I am so afraid of drowning. Are the gentlemen good swimmers?" Gentlemen (in chorus): "Oh, no; we can't swim at all." Lady: "Then I think I'll go with you, for in that case you are sure to be careful."

THE honeymoon was not many months old. "Well, darling," he asked, as he took her in his arms on his return from the office, "shall we go out on our bicycles, or would you prefer that I should order the carriage?" "Dearest," she softly responded, gazing lovingly up into his eyes, "you know I am yours for wheel or for whorl."

THERE is no place like the House of Commons for a "nice derangement of metaphor." It will be a long time before we shall have a "mixture" equal to the outburst of an effusive orator, who said: "The British lion, whether it is roaming the deserts of India or climbing the forests of Canada, will not draw in its horns nor retire into its shell."

NOT IN HIS PRESCRIPTION.—"Ah, good-morning, Pa! How has your father been since I saw you last?" asked a passer-by. "Niver a change, sor! He's loomberin' around wid the same old complaint he's had these foive years," answered Pa. "Does the doctor give him any hopes?" "No, sor! An' he jabsers O! beleave that's about the only thing he hasn't given 'im!"

"Who is that long-haired young fellow who seems to have nothing to do?" inquired the casual observer. "That's our poet," said the village clerk. "The village clubs together and pays his board and clothes." "Where are his works published?" "Ain't never published. He's arranged to have 'em printed after he's dead. That's why we are trying to keep him alive as long as we can."

TERRY had just been introduced. She was a pretty country girl, and he a wheelman, vain of his personal appearance when clad in cycling costume. "I assure you there is scarcely a man who does not find the wheel suit most becoming," he observed. "Indeed!" said she, doubtfully. "As for myself, everybody insists that I look one hundred per cent. better in bicycle costume than in an ordinary business suit." "Dear me!" innocently. "How awfully you must look in an ordinary business suit."



## SOCIETY.

QUAKERS are said to be unusually long-lived.

Edison states that few people know the sound of their own voices.

Men with gray or blue eyes are usually better marksmen than those with dark eyes.

Queen Isabella of Spain has a moustache which a dragon would not despise.

The young Duke of Albany shows, it is said, a decided inclination for soldiering.

It is a somewhat interesting fact that the popular games in England and the United States are identical.

The Court will remain in Scotland until the middle of November, and is then to return to Windsor for a month.

The ex-Empress Eugénie's hair has now become as white as snow, and she is only able to walk with the aid of a stick.

The Rajah of Indore, who likes showy things, has had a furniture set made all of glass—glass bedsteads and chairs, huge glass sideboards, and other articles of domestic use.

There are actually people in England, belonging to cultured and well-to-do classes, who have taken to let their children run about in a barefooted condition, by way of hardening them.

The young China Emperor is stated to be very fond of the Society women of his country, very few of whom can read or write; he is also fond of opium, which inspissated gummy juice is obtained from the heads of poppies specially grown for His young Celestial Majesty's use.

The return of Princess Frederica of Hanover to Hampton Court after an absence of a year will be warmly welcomed by the residents in the palace and Bushy Park, among whom she has won great popularity by her kindness of heart and graciousness of demeanour. She occupies the south-west wing of the palace on the right of the entrance.

A suggestion comes from abroad that the fragrant geranium—the old-fashioned rose geranium beloved by our grandmothers—keeps flies away. A moderate-sized geranium plant is said to be so disagreeable to flies that they avoid its neighbourhood, and two of these plants in a room will drive them out altogether.

Only those who are immediately surrounding the Prince and Princess of Wales realize how pathetically devoted they both are to their only remaining son. Since the Duke of Clarence's death, Prince George has given every spare moment of his time to his father and mother, who seem loth to lose sight of him either for duty or pleasure.

Nearly five hundred women are employed in the administration of railroads in France. The women are paid just half as much as the men, while working just as much. It is necessary that the applicant for such a position should be either the daughter or wife of an employee, or the widow of one formerly employed.

The Princess of Wales and her daughters have to some extent discarded the deep mourning which they have so long worn for the Duke of Clarence. The Princess now wears a tailor-made gown of black serge, with a grey silk blouse. Her hat is sailor shape, of black straw, with a dark-grey ribbon round the crown.

It looks as if the wedding of the Princess Margaret of Prussia, which was fixed for November, has now been postponed till the beginning of the next year, when the Court of Berlin will be holding high carnival. The Emperor wishes to invest the nuptials of his youngest and only unmarried sister with as much brilliancy as possible; and the best time, certainly, for doing this is January, when His Majesty, following the practice of all his predecessors, gives a rapid succession of gorgeous entertainments.

## STATISTICS.

SEVEN EIGHTHS of the bread used in London is made of American wheat.

FIFTY EIGHT thousand women belong to trade-unions in England.

At the age of forty a man usually attains his highest weight; a woman at fifty.

A NEW year's-bark over 15 000 000 leeches were used medicinally in England every year.

A BRAIN specialist says that nearly a quarter of all the cases of insanity are hereditary.

The Salvation Army publishes thirty-one weekly newspapers, and five monthly magazines in thirty-seven different colonies and countries, with a total annual circulation of forty-five million copies.

## GEMS.

A PRUDENT head is watchful of the tongue that vibrates in the mouth of it.

WORRY is a fruitful source of misery and the prime cause of premature breakdowns.

LIFE is a journey, and he who has least of a burden to carry travels the fastest and most happily.

THE world will be nearer right when a man has learned to laugh a little less at his neighbour's troubles, and a little more at his own.

WITTY sayings are as easily lost as the pearls slipping off a broken string; but a word of kindness is seldom spoken in vain. It is a seed which, even when dropped by chance, springs up into a flower.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**DELICIOUS STEAMED PUDDING.**—Half a cup of sugar, half a cup of butter, one egg, one cup of buttermilk, one teaspoonful of soda, add flour until stiff as cake, then a cup of stoned and chopped raisins, or any fruit you have. Pour it into a two-quart basin, and steam an hour and a half. Serve with boiled sauce.

**HAM FRITTERS.**—Mince any left boiled ham, fat and lean equal quantities. With each pound of mince put two eggs, a cupful of fine breadcrumbs, and half a teaspoonful of white pepper. Make a custard with custard powder, cut some neat, small slices of bread, soak in the custard, and fry with some hot butter. When lightly browned take them out, and spread the mixture thickly over them, placing a layer of breadcrumbs on the top, and fry them three or four minutes.

**CHUTNEY.**—Two pounds apples, one and a half pounds sugar, three-quarters of a pound sultana, one ounce ginger, one and a half pints vinegar, two ounces salt, one ounce chilis, one ounce garlic, two ounces mustard seed, quarter of a pound tamarinds. Cut the apples up in very small pieces, of course, pare them first, and stew them in the vinegar; cut the chilis up very finely, also the garlic; when the apples are cold, stir in all the other ingredients; put into bottles, and put before a fire for several days.

**BLACK CURRANT JELLY.**—Four pounds currants, one pound raspberries, sugar, pick the larger stalks and leaves from the currants and raspberries, and wash the currants in cold water. Put all on in a jelly-pan with four breakfast-cupfuls of water, and allow them to heat gradually to boiling point, stirring frequently, then let them boil gently for about ten minutes. Pour the whole into a pointed flannel jelly-bag to drain till all the juice has run out without pressure. Measure the juice, and to each pint allow one pound of sugar, and add half a pound more. Put this on the fire and stir frequently till it boils. Allow it to boil for five minutes, then skim and pot.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

COBK and bamboo penholders will be found a relief to persistent writers.

It is well to keep large pieces of charcoal in damp corners and in dark places.

When a person in Sweden buys any intoxicating beverage, he must also buy something to eat at the same time.

The most important Japanese holiday is the Feast of the Lanterns, from July 13th to 16th. It is the Japanese Memorial day.

The Japanese language has no swear words. The worst thing you can say to or of a man is to call him a fellow.

The most extraordinary instances of longevity on record are to be found amongst those who have lived chiefly in the open air.

ABSOLUTE cleanliness—sweet, wholesome, dainty cleanliness—is the best and only safe cosmetic in the world.

The region about the Dead Sea is one of the hottest places on the globe, and the sea is said to lose a million tons of water a day by evaporation.

A CHEMIST advises that canned fruit be opened an hour or two before it is used. It is far richer after the oxygen of the air has been restored to it.

The soil of Hayti is so fertile that three crops of corn are often raised in a year. The natives, however, are too indolent to avail themselves of these advantages, and they only work for enough to enable them to live.

The French flag was adopted during the revolution. The republic first took green, but gave it up, and blended the Bourbon white with the red and blue, the colours of the city of Paris.

SHADS, when baking, place one of their number on guard to give the alarm in case of danger. The signal is a quick clap of the flippers on a rook. Rabbits signal with their forepaws, and have regular signals and calls.

HERE is an idea of what a little spot of land may do in the way of production: The Island of Jamaica sells annually to the United States bananas exceeding in value the entire apple, peach and cherry crops of this country.

In China the cobbler reams from house to house, announcing his approach with a rattle. When called by those who need his services, he does his work at the homes of his patrons; and, if the job is a long one, boards with them until it is done.

THE Chinese superstition about lucky and unlucky colours is one that foreign merchants must observe when they attempt to sell their wares in China. The use of black paper as a wrapping for needles has militated against their sale in China. Blue must be especially avoided on wrappers of goods intended for the Chinese market, while red is auspicious.

ENGINEERS judge of the condition of their machinery by the tone it gives out while running. Every engine, whether stationary or locomotive, has a particular tone of its own; the engineer becomes accustomed to that, and any departure from it at once excites a suspicion that all is not right. The engineer may not know what is the matter, he may have no ear for music, but the change in tone of his machine will be instantly perceptible, will be instantly recognised, and will start him on an immediate investigation.

A NEW addition has been made to the French cuisine—rattlesnakes. One of these charming reptiles, it appears, belonging to a travelling showman, died in Paris a short time ago from indigestion caused by a tortoise which it had swallowed whole. An enterprising medical gentleman had a portion of it cooked, and he gave it to his dogs and cats. Finding that they sustained no ill effects, he tried it himself; and he declares that, with caper-sauce, it is as good as salmon, eel, or carp.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**THRO.**—Such queries are not answered in these columns.

**CASSANDRA.**—The spot will fade in time, but no application will remove it.

**FORLORN MABEL.**—Only a surgeon who can see it will be able to tell you.

**WIDE-AWAKE.**—Powdered glass is used in manufacturing cements for frosting cards, &c.

**A SOLDIER'S DARLING.**—The 1st Welsh Regiment is at present at Malta; do so at Cardiff.

**R. F. B.**—You would see advertisements for agents in the papers if you consulted them.

**HEAD OF THE FAMILY.**—If the house is taken at so much per week, a week's notice would be sufficient.

**ALARM.**—The best thing you can do is to have your lungs properly examined by a physician.

**CONSTANT READER.**—We have never heard of the article, and have no idea where it can be obtained.

**SALLY.**—September 30, 1884, was a Friday; October 31, 1885, was a Tuesday.

**THURSO.**—Your landlord is not bound to accept less than six months' notice, to expire on March quarter day. You are a yearly tenant, although you pay your rent every two months.

**A MISERABLE WOMAN.**—You are not bound out of your own earnings to pay drink bills contracted by your husband, nor has he any power whatever over money you may earn by your own work.

**TOM.**—For the City of London Police, candidates must not be under 21 nor over 32 years of age; they must not be less than five feet nine inches in height, nor have more than two children.

**HASTEN.**—The widow must make a will, stating clearly what she desires to be done with her property, and she must sign this will in the presence of two witnesses, who must have no interest in the will.

**HASTINGS.**—The accident occurred on the London and North Western Railway near Aberglaw, North Wales, on August 30, 1888. There was a collision between the Irish mail train and a luggage train. Barrels of petroleum ignited, and 33 persons were burned to death.

**G. R.**—Longfellow's "Village Smithy" shod in Brattle-street, Cambridge, U.S.; as for the smith, history knows nothing of him, but the chestnut tree was cut down, and a chair was made out of it and presented to the poet by the children of the village.

**T. H. W.**—The premium on gold is caused by its scarcity: gold has a standard value; the sovereign, for instance, is never worth less than 30s., but in many countries the shilling is often worth much less than twelve pence.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Candidates for the Metropolitan Police must be under 27 years of age, five feet nine inches in height, and able to read and write. The pay commences at twenty-four and rises to thirty shillings a week.

**Geo.**—Bahamas are about 600 in products number, mostly low, flat islands, only twenty or so inhabited, north of, but really part of, the West Indies; are tropical fruits, salt, sponge, and hard woods; trade largely with United States; business enterprise not very largely developed.

**EMMENTRUDE.**—The ermine is certainly a British animal, though in this country it is more generally called the "stoat." Neither in England nor in Scotland does the fur of this animal become white in winter, and ermine fur is generally imported from Norway, Lapland, and North America.

**J. B.**—You cannot get into the Civil Service, that is certain, because admission in all cases is obtained only by successful competition at the examinations, and that, you know, you are not fit for, because you would have to compete with those who have been specially educated for the post.

**AN INVETERATE SMOKER.**—Smokers of tobacco can get rid of its odour by using the following mouth-wash: Olibriste of lime, six drams; water, four ounces; agitate together and let stand for an hour, filter, and add of pure spirit four ounces; tincture of orris root and orange flower water, of each one ounce. Before using, dilute it with a little water.

**A SUFFERER.**—Blisters—one of those trifles which can cause hours of discomfort—may usually be avoided. Turn the stockings inside out, and thoroughly coat the heel with soap (having left the cake a few minutes in the water to soften), and then soap the heel itself thoroughly before putting the stocking on. This will prevent blisters, or heal them if they are already there.

**OLIVE.**—You have described writer's cramp; the cure is difficult of application; it is to get rid of the cause and the effect will cease—in other words, cease from writing; or, failing ability to do that, write as little as possible; find the angle of the desk at which you can write with greatest facility, and get a cork penholder, shaped like a cigar: all little helps.

**EMMENTRUDE.**—From England to Melbourne the fares are liable to change. The third-class fare is from twelve to fourteen guineas. The latter is by steamer. A sailing ship takes nearly three months to make the voyage, while a steamer takes from forty-two to forty-nine days. Clothing is dearer than in England, but less is required owing to the heat of the climate. You should take all the clothes you have as well as new ones.

**IRRENE.**—To wash ribbon ruches, just dip them in ammonia and water. They must not be squeezed or wrung out, but dipped and smoothed until clean, then rinsed and dried. Then recur the ruffled ruches with curling tongs as if they were hair.

**AUNTIE.**—An excellent method of cleansing the hair is with the yolk of an egg. Rub it into the roots of the hair with the hand, a little at a time. The result will be a soapy lather, which rinse out first with tepid water and afterward with cold water. Rub the head well with a dry towel.

**RIGHTOUS WRATH.**—The person who makes no attempt to save a drowning companion, though the means of rescue are at hand, is guilty of the grossest cowardice, but though he is in a sense morally responsible for the death of the man, he does not commit a crime for which statute law will hold him answerable.

**ADOLPHUS.**—The signature of the cross—the mark which persons who are unable to write are required to make—was not always confined to illiterate persons; for among the Saxons the mark of the cross, as an attestation of the good faith of the persons signing, was required to be attached to the signature of those who could write, as well as to stand in the place of the signature of those who could not write. The ancient use of the cross was, therefore, universal.

**WALTER.**—The native country of the sweet potato is not certainly known. There is evidence in favour of both its American and East Indian origin, but it has not been found in the wild state in either country. Columbus presented sweet potatoes to Queen Isabella on his return to Spain, and the plant was in general cultivation in that country in the middle of the sixteenth century. Its cultivation in China and other parts of the East has been traced to very early times.

## ENDURANCE.

How much the heart may bear, and yet not break!  
How much the flesh may suffer, and yet not die!  
I question much if any pain or ache

Of soul or body brings our end more nigh.  
Death chooses his own time, till that is shown  
All evils may be borne.

We shrink and shudder at the surgeon's knife,  
Each nerve recoiling from the cruel steel.  
Whose edge seems searching for the quivering life;  
Yet to our senses the bitter pang revealed  
That still, although the trembling flesh be torn,  
This also can be borne.

We see a sorrow rising in our way,  
And try to flee from the approaching ill;  
We seek some small escape, we weep and pray;  
But when the blow falls, then our hearts are still;  
Not that the pain is of the sharpest sort,  
But that it can be borne.

We wind our life about another life;  
We hold it closer, dearer than our own;  
Anon it faints and falls in deathly strife,  
Leaving us stunned and stricken and alone;  
But ah! we do not die with those we mourn—  
This also can be borne.

Behold, we live through all things—famine, thirst,  
Sorrow, pain, all grief and misery,  
All we and sorrow. Life inflicts its worst  
On soul and body—but we cannot die.  
Though we be sick and tired and faint and worn—  
Lo, all things can be borne!

**HAL.**—Various expedients are resorted to for the removal of glass from coats; some sponge the cloth with a weak solution of liquid ammonia in water; others steam the parts by laying a bit of damp cloth upon them and then putting a hot smoothing iron on that; others put at the rate of a tablespoonful of oxgall (from a butcher) into a gallon of warm rain water, and go over the glassy parts with that, following by sponging with pure rain water.

**LARDED O' COCKNEY.**—Politeness was once defined as "Kindness kindly expressed." The definition is certainly an excellent one, and should be impressed upon the minds of all young persons. A rude or careless young man throws away many of his chances of success if he allows himself to do ill-bred and disagreeable things. There is a high commercial value to politeness, and every young man, when starting in life, should make it a part of his capital stock.

**HOUSEKEEPER.**—Vinegar is an excellent preservative of meat, especially in hot summer weather. A broad meat is frequently put into a clean linen cloth which is thoroughly soaked with vinegar, some salt also being sprinkled on the cloth. Meat kept for a few days in this manner is very tender and is easily digested. It is thought that vinegar might be advantageously employed on the large scale for the preservation of meat together with complete exclusion of air.

**PEDIGREE.**—A generation is the interval of time that elapses between the birth of a father and the birth of his son, and was generally used in computing considerable periods of time, both in sacred and profane history. The interval of a generation is consequently of uncertain length, and depends on the standard of human life, and whether the generations are reckoned by eldest, middle, or youngest sons. Thirty-three years have usually been allowed as the mean length of a generation, or three generations for every hundred years. In compiling pedigrees, great attention is necessary to the number of generations in any given period, as they form a guide to the probability of persons having sprung from any particular individual.

**TED'S LASSIE.**—You surely forget that we do not know the young man personally, and are in consequence quite ignorant of his capabilities; is he a blacksmith, baker, builder, tailor, or what? Obviously his "salary" must be regulated by the sort of service he gives in return for it; all we can say, in answer to such an indefinite question, is that in Texas or California the young man will at least have latitude enough to develop his talents, and if he has push in him, and a good constitution at back of it, he will get on.

**COLONIST.**—You must give up all thought of going out as a wine merchant or grocer; no opening for such in any colony; but as a farm labourer, who may in a short time, by keeping his wife active, become a farmer himself; there is room for you just now in Canada; send 1d. stamp to Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, E.W., for Canadian Handbook (office), and ask at same time to be furnished with the latest reports regarding demand for labour in Canada; office is Government one, and answers gratis.

**IN FAMILIARITY.**—The head engineer usually appoints his own subordinates, and your best plan would be undoubtedly to call personally on him; but if you prefer you can write to the manager of the "line," stating that you have been for such a length of time in such a place, and had previously experienced extending over so long a period in other places (naming them), you are now desirous of obtaining a situation abroad, and respectfully request that you may be permitted to apply for any vacancy there may be in any of the manager's vessels; you are prepared to give the fullest references to character and ability which he may desire, and to ship without delay.

**BEKEDDIT.**—A common ecclesiastical license is obtained from the Ordinary of the place or his surrogate, and costs a little over forty shillings. The applicant must make oath as to his belief that there is no lawful impediment; that either he or the lady has had his or her usual place of abode for fifteen days immediately preceding within the parish where the marriage is to be solemnized; and where either he or she, not being a widower or widow, is under the age of twenty-one, and the consent of the father, or, if the father is dead, of the guardian, or if there is no guardian, then of the mother, being unmarried, or if no mother unmarried, then of the guardian appointed by the court, has been obtained. The common license having been granted, the marriage will be solemnized under the same conditions as it is by banns.

**DOUBTFUL.**—The term of reproach "turn-coat" is said to have taken its rise from one of the first dukes of Savoy, whose dominions, lying open to the incursions of the two contending houses of Spain and France, he was obliged to temporize and be friendly with that house that was most likely to distress him, according to the success of their respective arms. Thus being often obliged to change sides, the duke ordered a coat to be made that was blue on one side and white on the other, and which might be worn either side out. To please the Spanish he wore the blue side out, and to keep in with the French the white side. Hence he was called Mammantel, surnamed the Turncoat, by way of distinguishing him from other princes of the same name of the house of Savoy.

**ROMA DARTLE.**—A morganatic marriage signifies among German princes a union in which it is stipulated that the wife being of inferior birth to her husband, neither she nor her children shall enjoy the privileges of his rank nor inherit his possessions. The marriage is, however, strictly legal, and the children are legitimate. Morganatic is by some interpreted as akin to the Gothic *morgogan*, to shorten or limit; an application of the word which, as has been suggested, would naturally rise out of the restrictions imposed on the wife and children of such a marriage. By others the term is referred to *morgengabe*, a free gift made by the husband on the morning succeeding the wedding. By some it is thought to mean left-handed, from the left hand being given in the ceremony instead of the right.

**JACK AND JILL.**—If the parties reside in different parishes, then application must be made for the banns to be published in each parish. The banns will accordingly be published on three successive Sundays in the parish church, or in each parish church. A small fee—two shillings or half-a-crown—is sometimes required for entering the banns. The marriage may then be celebrated at any time within three months from the date of the last publication at the church, or at one of the two churches where the banns have been published. If the banns have been published in two churches, then a certificate of publication must be procured from the clergyman of the church where the marriage is not to be solemnized, and given to the officiating clergyman of the other church. There is a fee to be paid (half-a-crown, we believe) to the clerk for this certificate.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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